

丈 月 城 著 絵 BUNBUN

クロニクル・レギオン

CHRONICLE LEGION

王子と獅子王

2

THE ROAD OF CONQUEST

JOE TAKEDUKI

&

BUNBUN
PRESENTS

ダッシュエックス文庫



クロニクル・レギオン

CHRONICLE LEGION

王将覇王

2

文 月 城 著 絵 BUNBUN





「ふふふ。
名刀はサムライの
刀^{カタ}だけではないぞ」

「いい剣だな、獅子王」



「ふっ。これでも」応、
お嬢さまですから」

「ところで
橘はなかなか育ちがいいな」

「いや、そういう意味じゃない。
体の育ちがいいということだ」

天龍五八年 皇國日本・東海道詳細図





Chapter 1 - Under the Black Knight's Shadow

Part 1

October in the year Tenryuu 58...

It was past the middle of the month and autumn was in full swing.

People called autumn the season of appetite and the time for sports. However, enjoying these pleasures would be a little difficult at Tachibana Masatsugu's current residence of Suruga City.

After all, *enemy armies* were occupying the "surroundings" of Suruga City.

"Taisei, how many days has it been since the British Empire's forces attacked?"

"It's the sixth day. Time sure flies, it's going to be a week soon."

Masatsugu was chatting with Okonogi Taisei, one of his few friends.

They were classmates studying in the second year of Rinzai Private High School. They had met up at the classroom of Year 2 Class 2, their homeroom.

Martial law had been proclaimed in Suruga City, yet Rinzai High decided to resume classes.

However, this did not mean their lives had returned to normal. Invading under the banner of the Restoration Alliance, the British Empire had taken over Shizuoka Prefecture using overwhelming military force.

Of the five tutelary forts in the prefecture, four had fallen.

The sole exception was this land of Suruga.

Thanks to Chevalier Akigase Rikka coming to the Suruga tutelary fort by chance—as well as Tachibana Masatsugu's efforts—they managed to halt the Restoration Alliance's advance.

The problem was that enemy forces still remained inside Shizuoka Prefecture.

Transportation networks going in and out of Suruga City were all blockaded by the Restoration Alliance. Neither trains nor automobiles could pass through.

Suruga City and its immediate surroundings were like an isolated island on land.

Martial law had been imposed five days ago when the British attacked and still had not been lifted. Normally, education institutions would suspend classes during martial law.

However, the high school where Masatsugu and Taisei studied had classes starting again.

This had nothing to do with the noble ideals of dedication to learning or defiance against military brutality.

Since escaping Suruga was impossible, people had nothing to do. Why not round up all the students and teachers in the city and run some lessons... Purely nothing more than that.

"In the end, it feels more like we came to school to chat. Without the teachers and students who commute from outside the city, normal classes can't really proceed."

"Even if you want to kill time by watching television, there's no reception."

Noetic control techniques for causing destructive interference with electromagnetic waves, wireless communications, and noetic waves were known as "noetic disruption."

After war broke out, Suruga had been under serious noetic disruption. Phones, televisions, and other household electrical appliances could not be used.

"By the way, residents in Shizuoka Prefecture can't watch television only because the prefecture's master control is located at Suruga. Of course, it's a different matter for those who live in areas that can

receive signals from Kantō or Aichi."

"Meaning that everyone is suffering because of us."

"Maybe that's also part of the Restoration Alliance's plan, to minimize the amount of unnecessary information received by residents in the prefecture—Oh, that reminds me."

Taisei suddenly changed the subject.

"For fourth period, students and teachers have to go off campus for community service."

As a side note, it was currently the break between second and third period.

The one who informed Masatsugu, Okonogi Taisei, was also the vice-president of the student council. He now spoke to *a third person* who had remained silent so far.

"I am terribly sorry to impose this on a knight... and Your Highness, Princess."

"Do not worry about it. This is more meaningful than idly wasting time."

Her elegant response prompted Taisei to retract his neck with a "much obliged."

Seeing her "classmate" react so timidly, the young maiden smiled and said, "We are all fellow students on a common quest for learning. There is no need to be so reserved."

"That's a fair point, but it's a bit too challenging for a commoner like me."

Despite speaking to Masatsugu as equals, Taisei acted especially respectful towards the young maiden.

This was only natural. The person before him had become a household name in Suruga City not too long ago. She was Fujinomiya Shiori the imperial princess.

Taisei and Masatsugu were conversing while standing in front of her seat.

Furthermore, this young and beautiful princess had her platinum blonde hair in a ponytail and was wearing the school blazer.

"If I remember correctly... Your Highness is sixteen, isn't that right?"

Despite saying he was going to remain reserved, Taisei actively initiated conversation with the princess.

Speaking of which, like his friend Masatsugu, Taisei was the kind of guy who marched at the beat of his own drum. Neither arrogant nor subservient, he was using polite forms without much rigor to speak to Shiori.

"That is correct."

"Then you are a second-year like us because—"

"I suppose it would count as skipping grades. Do know that I did pass the transfer exam, so skipping grades is the result based on academic results." Shiori then added mischievously, "Naturally, it was thoughtful of the school to assign me to the same homeroom as Masatsugu-sama."

"I think so too."

Technically, Fujinomiya Shiori was also a student of outstanding academic excellence.

She not only kept up with second-year courses effortlessly but also demonstrated the intellect to achieve perfect scores on minor tests and classroom participation in all subjects.

The only exception was PE class which she opted out using an excuse of "frailty in health."

...But of course, Masatsugu was aware of the truth.

There was nothing wrong with the princess' health. She boycotted PE class only because she needed to keep her top secret of "athletic

ineptitude."

However, the beautiful and charming princess commented nonchalantly, "Since Suruga is currently in a crisis, perhaps I shouldn't be saying this... However, I honestly feel very happy. Ever since a long time ago, I have always wanted to experience school life like this."

She did not neglect to offer a demure smile.

She had not forgotten the *cover story* she had used during the interview for the news program last time. Having played the part so many times, her ability to feign docility was like second nature.

Masatsugu had heard that Shiori had skipped grades to enter university during her studies in Rome.

Enrolling in high school in Japan was to create the image of "the young and frivolous princess." In truth, the princess with ambitions to take over Japan was a diligent learner who had not only mastered all regular academic disciplines but also politics, diplomacy, history and cultural studies of various nations, and even military strategy...

Born in the right era, she would be qualified as a first-rate strategist. That was how much of an elite she was.

"By the way, Vice-President."

Since Taisei was a member of the student council, Shiori always addressed him by his title.

It was probably unintentional on her part, but there was a "princess asking a retainer's opinion on national affairs" kind of classy tone to it.

"As one might expect, there are not too many students at school."

"Many people believe it's not a time to be attending school."

The classroom was quiet and unoccupied during break.

Student numbers were low. Today's attendance was only 50%.

"The Restoration Alliance has not attacked since the night before yesterday... No one knows when the fighting will resume. I can understand their feelings of wanting to stay home."

"But you don't feel the same way, Vice-President?"

"I shoulder the responsibilities of the student council, after all. If other students are coming, I can't feign ignorance. Besides, if I go to school... Or rather, go near the dorms, there's a Lord Chevalier protecting us."

Answering the princess, Taisei glanced obliquely at Masatsugu.

"I really look forward to your power to drive away the Restoration Alliance, Masatsugu-kun."

"Certainly, I will try to the best of my meager ability..." Masatsugu answered with a shrug.

He had informed the school of his ability to control Legions and his intention to use this power to protect Suruga City.

Only by doing so did he obtain the necessary leniency afforded to "the princess' knight."

"Undeniably, there are many things in this world that are beyond my ability. Just think of me as a straw that happened to show up when everyone is drowning."

"Forget about a big ship, but at least convince us you're a lifeboat."

Taisei had readily accepted the fact that his classmate was a Chevalier.

He knew of Masatsugu's memory loss and his unusually tough fighting ability. Upon hearing of the truth, he showed a "that explains everything" kind of look.

Just as the princess, the Chevalier and the high school boy were chatting away...

"...This moment alone, there are already two Chevaliers in this school."

A stern girl's clear voice interrupted their conversation.

A black-haired beauty had arrived at the classroom, dressed in Imperial Japan's army officer uniform rather than Rinzei High's female uniform.

Taisei reeled in surprise.

The girl in military uniform continued, "Perhaps not a lifeboat, but some level of assurance could be provided."

"Oh, it's Akigase-dono."

"It has been a while, Hiji—No, Tachibana-dono. It is most wonderful to see you in good health, Your Highness."

Hanging at the black-haired girl's belt was a Japanese sword in its scabbard.

This gallant appearance belonged to the Suruga tutelary fort's current castellan, Chevalier Akigase Rikka. Masatsugu could not possibly mistake the identity of a striking beauty of her caliber.

He said, "Not too long of a while, really. We met yesterday and the day before."

"I-Indeed, you are right."

Rikka panicked a little when Masatsugu reminded her.

Three nights ago, Masatsugu had defeated the Kamuy of the Restoration Alliance on her behalf. The next day, Rikka had paid a visit to thank him. The day after that, she came again to express her gratitude solemnly.

And today, Akigase Rikka was here again.

She even visited the school while class was in session, leaving her military duties behind.

Although the Suruga tutelary fort and Rinzai High were "neighbors," less than half an hour's drive apart...

Rikka's attitude was inexplicably courteous, despite her status as a fiefdom "princess." Her father was Akigase Shouzan, the Governor General ruling over Tōkaidō.

"By the way, Akigase-dono, may I ask what you're doing here today?"

"Y-Yes. Like you, Tachibana-dono, we are both Chevaliers protecting Suruga."

When speaking, Rikka avoided eye contact with Masatsugu.

"It is only right that we make the most of chances to interact and get to know each other better. Th-That is, if it is alright with you."

"Oh I see. To share insight as Chevaliers?"

"Yes, precisely, Chevaliers have plenty of insight to share."

"Is it necessary for you to come all the way to the school?"

"I-I happen to be free. I did worry about disturbing you, but I did not want to waste time, so I brazenly paid a visit."

"Akigase-dono, you're definitely the busiest person in Suruga right now."

"N-Not at all. Having received my rank from the imperial state, I am merely fulfilling my obligations. Please understand."

Rikka mustered her courage to converse with Masatsugu.

Rather than a sharing of insight between Chevaliers, this was more akin to a young maiden suppressing her bashful feelings to boldly approach "the object of her affections."

Deciding not to think too much about it, Masatsugu nodded.

Introverted sheltered young ladies were to his liking, but he also

found it very cute when girls expressed their affections honestly.

No matter which kind of girl Akigase Rikka was, at least there was no doubt that she was highly attractive. Her feelings also delighted him.

Masatsugu said to her, "Sure, but let's not stand and talk in a classroom. We'll go outside."

"Y-Yes. It would be my pleasure."

"Uh, Masatsugu-kun, class will be starting in two minutes, you know?"

"Sorry, this is part of work, so help me smooth things over with the teacher."

In front of his delighted knight companion, Masatsugu asked his friend for a favor sullenly.

Meanwhile, his liege Fujinomiya Shiori revealed a momentary look of panic while listening to his conversation with Rikka. She coughed lightly and said, "Excuse me, Masatsugu-sama, please allow Hatsune to accompany you if there will be a discussion regarding Chevalier matters."

"Why is that?"



"Consider this, did we not mention previously... Hatsune wishes to inherit the Appellation that has been the Tachibana family's heirloom? It stands to reason that Hatsune would benefit from attending a conversation between Chevaliers. Yes, it is decided so. Besides, on further thought..."

Shiori and said in an innocent tone of voice, "I should take part in your discussion too. It is a princess' duty to respond to the loyalty shown by you knights."

"...I see."

Could the princess be jealous because he was skipping class to go on a "date"?

Musing upon this disrespectful speculation, Masatsugu agreed to Shiori's request. Surprised by the sudden development but unable to offer words of objection, Rikka had no choice but to acquiesce.

Part 2

"Which is why... Now is the time to take a leap, Onii-sama!"

"Hatsune, I haven't the foggiest idea where you're coming from."

Tachibana Hatsune's serious declaration was dismissed indifferently by Masatsugu.

Akigase Rikka had shown up twenty minutes earlier. Leaving Year 2 Class 2's homeroom where they were earlier, they had gone to an open-air cafe outside the school building, thus leading to the above exchange.

It was currently third period and there was no noise around.

Shiori and Rikka were present but Taisei did not come along.

"Actually during class today, I've been thinking about something and couldn't focus on the lesson. All things considered, Suruga currently—no, Japan currently needs a great hero like Tachibana Hatsune."

"Isn't it a bit weird to be calling yourself the great hero who slacks off in class?"

Hatsune was a student of Year 1 Class 1.

After Masatsugu went to fetch her at her classroom, this lady-in-waiting of Shiori's sat down in the open-air cafe and began to talk gibberish.

Hatsune had broached her topic too abruptly, which is why Masatsugu ridiculed her on everyone's behalf.

"By taking a leap, you mean..."

"Becoming a Chevalier, of course. I've already gotten my hands on the treasured Appellation."

"So you're very certain you'll become a hero."

"Come on, in a situation like this, a cool title is obligatory even if a little lying is in order. All I need to do after the fact is explain it was just my personal opinion, Onii-sama."

"I see."

"Those who call themselves professional creators are pretty much all like that."

"From what I've heard, people who call themselves producers are exaggerating, more often than not."

"Hatsune and Masatsugu-sama, aren't you two going on a bit of a tangent?" Shiori tactfully cautioned them to steer the conversation back on topic. "Currently in Hatsune's possession, the Tachibana clan's Kurou Hougan is the issue here."

"Indeed, indeed, you are very right, Princess."

Capable of fluently responding to her noble lady, Hatsune was truly no ordinary character.

She took out a blue scroll from her schoolbag. Believed to be the manifestation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Appellation, it was quite a distinguished artifact.

Furthermore, Hatsune was dressed in *Haikara-san* style as usual.

Meisen kimono paired with hakama and boots, an old-fashioned style of school uniform for girls.

"For the past fifty years, no one in the Tachibana clan has been able to use it... No one knows the trick to clearing the succession ritual." In a casual tone of voice, Hatsune revealed the horrifying truth. "There were seven or eight challengers over the years, but they all died during the succession ritual, so they provided no reference value at all."

"To have had so many challengers, the Tachibana clan truly lives up to its reputation as ruffians."

"For a while, it was apparently fashionable to use this trial as a coming of age ritual♪ Because of that, our clan doesn't have many young people nowadays."

"I see, that is quite fascinating," Rikka remarked poignantly after listening to the conversation between the princess and Hatsune. "This is quite similar to a certain country's hunters. It is said that they must hunt and kill a lion single-handedly before they are considered full-fledged adults."

"That's samurai spirit too, Rikka-sama," said Hatsune cheerfully to Rikka, the female hero who had become a Chevalier earlier than her. "The ancient Japanese were pretty barbaric too, like disemboweling themselves, or beheading enemy generals for trophies to claim credit in battle."

"That is true too. In fact, when I inherited Yasutsuna..."

The treasured sword of Genji pedigree, Onikiri Yasutsuna. Rikka unfastened the Appellation that was hanging on her belt in the form of a Japanese sword and stood it up on a chair.

The maiden Chevalier looked at her beloved sword and said nostalgically, "Everyone said failure in succession would lead to death—At first, I felt daunted too."

"Oh right! There's something I wanted to ask you, Rikka-sama. What did it feel like when you were inheriting an Appellation? And how did you achieve success?"

"I don't mind telling you, but it probably will not be of much help."

"Huh?"

"When inheriting a high-level Appellation such as Yasutsuna or Kurou Hougan, the trial undertaken during the ritual is unique. The will residing within the Appellation will alter the trial depending on the challenger... That is what I have learned."

After listening to Rikka's explanation, Masatsugu nodded. When inheriting Hijikata Toshizō's Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, he had felt some kind of will within the sword too.

Tōkaidō's premier Chevalier, Rikka, spoke again, "All things considered... The succession ritual is no more than a beginning. What truly matters are one's battle achievements after becoming a Chevalier, and these Appellations know this all too well."

"Mm-hmm."

"Although there is a risk of death, it is ultimately just a test. Just give it your best attempt as though you were taking a bungee jump from a cliff, Tachibana."

"Understood!"

Rikka naturally called her by her family name and Hatsune replied energetically.

Their conversation style was almost like the kind you find in athletic clubs between senior and junior members. The two girls were both "fighters" accomplished in martial arts. Perhaps this made them particularly compatible on the same wavelength.

Concluding the topic with a vague appeal to the power of mind over body, Rikka then spoke grimly, "Of the many puzzling points in the current situation... There is one that I find the most concerning."

"What is it, Rikka-sama?" Shiori immediately asked in response to the lady knight's serious tone.

Rikka was sitting very straight, facing her respected princess with dignity.

"What bothers me is the girl who came over to attack me prior to attack on Suruga by the Kinai Fiefdom's Legions. She used a strange power to bewitch me—Back then, I was prepared to succumb any moment."

This incident had led to Rikka falling unconscious and Tachibana Masatsugu fighting in her stead.

"Your Highness mentioned... That she might be related to the British royal family?"

"That I cannot assert with certainty. All I can say is the likelihood is not small."

The grandchild of the sacred beast Lord Tenryuu, the princess quietly nodded.

Shiori had speculated that the blonde enchantress must have definite ties to the British forces—Perhaps she is a princess of royalty like herself.

In other words, it was possible that she belonged to the bloodline of a godlike sacred beast and possessed mystic powers.

"The method she bewitched me... was definitely a potent power akin to magic or sorcery. It would be quite a bad situation if she is able to use that technique repeatedly in succession. If important officials across Japan, or even the Empress herself at the capital, were to fall under such sorcery—"

Rikka murmured worriedly but Shiori immediately rejected the idea.

"No, I believe there is no worry of that."

"How so?"

"If such a powerful ability could be invoked at will, the British Empire would have annexed Japan long ago without needing to go to war. The dream of conquering the world would be feasible too. However, reality indicates otherwise—My guess is that there should be strict conditions to its practical use."

For example, time or date restrictions and usage conditions. Shiori raised a few possibilities and smiled at Rikka. "Why don't we think of it this way? Britain had to resort to using their treasured trump card against you, Rikka-sama... And their operation ultimately failed. Forget this threat of sorcery for the time being, I believe it is of no concern of all."

"I see, that makes plenty of sense."

The princess' clear and logical explanation was very persuasive and

Rikka understood.

Smiling, she nodded and neither raised the issue of the "mysterious girl" again nor showed signs of worrying about it.

Cautious and meticulous yet sensible enough to not fall into paranoia—

This attitude was the mark of a hero's caliber. Akigase Rikka really was quite something. Masatsugu decided he had to inform her of something.

"Akigase-dono and Hatsune, there's something you must know," Masatsugu began to recount patiently.

"I never would have thought... you had lost your memory, Tachibana-dono."

In the driver's seat, holding the steering wheel, Rikka remarked in shock.

Masatsugu was sitting next to her in the front passenger seat. The lady Chevalier was driving a domestic sports car, speeding along a mountain road towards the Suruga tutelary fort. Despite her vehicle's high speed, her driving was not dangerous at all.

...Due to his memory loss, Tachibana Masatsugu was unable to replenish ectoplasmic fluid using the normal method—

Just earlier, Masatsugu had explained his weakness concisely. Now, they were resuming the previous conversation while on the road because Rikka needed to return to the tutelary fort.

"I only have memories of the past two years."

"In other words, you have no recollection of your past life... or your true name?"

"That's right," Masatsugu admitted readily, further surprising Rikka.

Also, the steering wheel and seats were clearly not standard issue.

They had been modified. Rikka's car was manual transmission rather than automatic. Since the military would not provide this kind of vehicle, Masatsugu concluded it must Rikka's personal property.

He could tell that she was quite into cars.

"...However, I believe your true name is already obvious. After all, you were able to use Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada as familiarly as your own limbs—"

"Even so, that doesn't necessarily mean I'm *the original owner*."

Was Masatsugu actually *Hijikata Toshizō*?

This question was very hard to resolve. Judging from the fragments of memories Shiori showed him, the answer seemed to be no, but he could not reject it completely.

To be honest, Masatsugu did not care whether he was Hijikata Toshizō or not.

However, Akigase Rikka's affections for Tachibana Masatsugu stemmed from this possibility.

Masatsugu needed to clear up this issue with her first. Since she was his and Shiori's most dependable ally, Masatsugu did not want to hide any secrets between each other that could bite them in the future.

"Akigase-dono," Masatsugu called to Rikka in a slightly more assertive tone than normal. "From your perspective... Is my true name that important?"

"Y-Yes."

"But to me, it's unimportant. Whether my name is Hijikata or not, being able to fight by your side against invaders is already an utmost honor."

"....."

"A true hero is the most valuable companion. I am very delighted for the good fortune of meeting you."

"W-What hero? Please don't make fun of me."

"I am not joking. If I had to pick *a comrade-in-arms and a wife* right here, Akigase-dono, you would be my choice. That's how amazing a person you are."

"Comrade-in-arms and... wiiiiife!?"

Rikka suddenly floored the gas pedal.

The car instantly accelerated then quickly slowed down again. The moment of surprise had probably caused her to step too hard by accident. It was quite rare for the courageous Rikka to be so flustered.

"T-Tachibana-dono. B-By saying wife, aren't you taking your joke too far...!?"

"Why? Akigase-dono, you are strong, virtuous, brave, and magnanimous. I think every man would certainly want to marry such a woman."

"N-No one has ever said that to me..."

"Then the men in this country are blind."

"Tachibana-dono—"

"Masatsugu is fine."

Rikka had addressed Masatsugu by his family name, but Masatsugu said seriously, "Using my family name makes it easy to mix up with Hatsune, which is confusing. Why don't you use my first name directly? We're comrades on the battlefield, there's no need to be formal."

"Well... How about Masatsugu-dono?"

"Sure."

Comrades riding across battlefields ought to bare their souls to one another.

Committed to a relationship of honesty, Masatsugu made intermittent conversation with Rikka. Fortunately, Rikka was not opposed to it. Despite her nervousness, she responded sincerely to Masatsugu.

Putting aside the issue of Hijikata Toshizō, both sides had to get to know each other first.

Just as Masatsugu's efforts were starting to bear fruit, Shiori finally spoke after a long period of silence in the back seat.

"Y-You two seem to be having a wonderfully engaging conversation as fellow Chevaliers."

The princess' voice sounded inexplicably sarcastic.

In fact, Shiori was riding the same car to the tutelary fort. Meanwhile, Rikka replied in panic as a member of the same sex.

"I-I beg your pardon, Your Highness!"

"Relax. It is a good thing to see you two getting along so well."

The tone of sarcasm could no longer be felt from the princess' voice.

The reflection of Shiori's usual smile of "beguiling innocence" could be seen on the rear-view mirror. Perhaps Masatsugu had gotten the wrong impression—Probably?

In any case, Shiori spoke with a princess' graceful airs, "Rikka-sama, have you received orders from your father at Nagoya...?"

"Yes. Orders were relayed to the Suruga tutelary fort just this morning. Regarding this matter, I would like to have a detailed discussion with Your Highness and Hiji—Masatsugu-dono about our future plans."

With telephone and mail unavailable, communication with the

outside world had to depend on retainer beasts.

The Tōkaidō Fiefdom's Governor General and his daughter Rikka had exchanged messages using the primitive magical method of "relaying orders through retainer beasts."

"By the way, Your Highness, have you received any instructions from the imperial palace at Tokyo?"

"None at all. Total silence. It could very well be that the palace hopes for me to go missing in this situation... This doesn't sound like a joke and is quite troubling, isn't it?"

Shiori shrugged and Rikka laughed boldly.

While the car took the two girls and Masatsugu up the mountain, there were no other vehicles driving along this military road given the state of martial law. The entire road was clear without impedance.

Soon enough, the car reached the premises of the tutelary fort.

The tutelary fort was located on Suruga City's tallest plateau, also known as Nihondaira. It used to be a famous scenic spot offering a view of Mount Fuji and Suruga Bay from afar.

There was a parking space reserved for the castellan in the high-ranking officers' lot.

After Rikka parked her beloved car into the reserved space, the trio walked together in the tutelary fort. Their destination was the nation-protecting keep in the center of the tutelary fort.

The nation-protecting keep was a forty-meter brick building, reminiscent of an ancient bell tower.

Along the way, many soldiers greeted them with reverent gazes or salutes. Their behavior was not entirely due to the presence of the authoritative castellan or the princess.

Masatsugu himself was also a Chevalier with an army of Legions.

Within the military, Chevaliers were afforded treatment as high-ranking officers.

Moreover, he was the one responsible for the victory a few days ago. And there was *rumor* too.

(Is he Hijikata-dono...?)

(I heard about that too...)

(People even say that the sword he's wearing is evidently Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada...)

The soldiers and officers whispered among themselves as Masatsugu walked by.

As expected of a military facility. Apart from Rikka, others had noticed Masatsugu controlling Legions, using Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship, and the Appellation of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada.

As a result, rumors exploded.

And also thanks to that, the soldiers of Suruga treated Tachibana Masatsugu with the greatest respect.

Pondering this strange development, Masatsugu came to the nation-protecting keep's lobby. The two girls in his company began to chat about practical business.

"My father, head of the Akigase, intends to drive out the Restoration Alliance from Shizuoka by sending forces from north of Mount Fuji—Yamanashi, in other words. The first place that needs to be retaken is the Fuji tutelary fort that they are currently using as a crucial stronghold... The Fuji tutelary fort is only dozens of kilometers away from Suruga here."

"In other words... Rikka-sama, you will be supporting the operation from Suruga?"

"We also plan on coordinating with the Kantō provincial army and Eastern Rome's garrison in Japan. Naturally, my father is already making preparations on this front."

Rikka brought up the subject of military strategy matter-of-factly.

Her intention was on one hand fulfilling her duty to explain the crisis situation to the imperial princess in as much detail as possible while recognizing Shiori's valuable insight on the other.

Princess Shiori and Chevalier Akigase Rikka.

A solid relationship of cooperation had gradually developed between them.

The instant Masatsugu nodded with satisfaction, a ringing sound was heard at the scene. A palm-size white fox manifested on Rikka's shoulder.

In charge of relaying communications, the small retainer beast brought news.

"...What?"

The pipe fox had brought news that shocked Rikka greatly.

Not only Rikka but Shiori and all the soldiers in the nation-protecting keep's lobby were also shocked. Masatsugu was the only one listening to the situation report silently.

"Hakone Checkpoint—*the* Hakone has fallen in merely half a day?"

Rikka muttered to herself, doubting her ears.

Hakone Checkpoint was reputedly Kantō's most impregnable point of strategic importance. Situated in the precipitous mountainous region of Hakone, it had tutelary forts built at four separate locations.

These four tutelary forts each had multiple Chevaliers stationed at all times.

These Chevaliers were all experienced soldiers serving the Kantō Fiefdom and had over four hundred Kamuy Legions under their command.

In addition, the four tutelary forts each had one ifrit assigned to them.

A total of four ifrits, respectively Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu. This powerful lineup protected the western part of the Kantō region, the heart of Imperial Japan.

Reportedly, Hakone's impregnable defenses were cracked by "one man's power alone."

"This means... The British Empire has a new Resurrectee?" Shiori whispered the moment she heard the man's name of "Edward."

Part 3

Edward the Black Prince had started his illustrious career of glorious victories at the mere age of sixteen.

That victory went down in history as the Battle of Crécy. Even today at the end of the twentieth century, it remained very well-known to war researchers.

The year 1346 CE was part of the European Middle Ages familiar to everyone.

To Edward, it was a nostalgic time of his adolescent past.

Fully educated as befitted an English prince, he honed his martial prowess and noble character as a knight, and raised his skills as a general through life on and off the battlefield—Those were the times.

Back then, England and France were at war.

This was the early stage of the so-called "Hundred Years' War." At the village of Crécy in French territory, a great battle took place to determine the fates of both nations.

The English army numbered ten thousand while the French army had forty thousand...

However, the English still won an overwhelming victory at Crécy. At the time, the English forces were headed by Edward's father, King Edward III of England (both father and son shared the same name, making it easy to mix them up).

King Edward organized his forces into three divisions to engage the French army.

Crown Prince Edward led one of the divisions and was extremely instrumental to the victory.

This battle was the prelude to a legend. The heroic saga of the

young and famous general, Prince Edward, would reach its pinnacle at the *Battle of Poitiers* that took place ten years after Crécy.

This time as the commander-in-chief, Edward led an army of six thousand to take on a French army of thirty thousand.

The disparity in numbers was even more unfavorable than at the Battle of Crécy. Nevertheless, Edward won an equally splendid victory and even managed to capture King John II of France.

Holding the French king hostage, England profited from both a handsome ransom and an advantage in diplomatic negotiations.

Furthermore, the Anglo-French war would drag on until 1453, long after Edward had *passed away in sickness*. The "maiden savior of France" who appeared towards the end was precisely Jeanne d'Arc.

Then time continued to march on, leading to the year 1998—

"From what I hear, that lady named Jeanne is quite popular in the modern world," said the "Black Prince" who had been reborn in the world.

In accordance with prior agreements, he would cast away the temporary alias of "Sir Black Knight" today.

"However, as an Englishman... I would like to take this chance to let everyone know that I, Edward, was in no way inferior."

This was the morning before he set off to conquer Hakone Checkpoint.

Early in the morning, he had sortied from the Fuji tutelary fort near the sacred mountain of Fuji, then marched east to assault Hakone Checkpoint—

Currently, Edward was riding on a wyvern's back, soaring leisurely through the sky over Hakone.

In just a few short hours, he had defeated all Japanese forces in the Hakone tutelary forts. With victory firmly in his hands, he was in a

very laid back mood.

The enemy consisted of five hundred Kamuys, the blue samurai of Imperial Japan.

The thousand black Legions fighting under Edward's command were Garter Knights, a superior variant of the British mainstay of the Crusade.

Edward's army had set up their formation in the sky over the vast Lake Ashi.

The four tutelary forts were respectively positioned north, east, south, and west of the lake. The first tutelary fort in the east was defended by the ifrit Seiryuu, the second tutelary fort in the south had Suzaku, the third tutelary fort in the west had Byakko, and the fourth tutelary fort in the north had Genbu. The united set of four guardian deities fought vigorously to resist the British invasion.

Unfortunately, they were ultimately no match against the thousand Knights of the Garter led by the Black Prince.

Edward's Chevalier Strength was 1256 and he summoned a full thousand to attack.

"Knights of the Garter, you have fought well. I, Edward, applaud your valor!"

Edward praised the black knights that were in formation over Lake Ashi.

Normally, the British Empire's mainstay Legion, the Crusade, was white in coloring. Edward's troops were *pitch-black* all over.

During the Middle Ages, Edward himself had roamed battlefields while clad in black armor.

That was how the nickname of the Black Prince came about. It was also why every Legion under his command was a black knight.

"Speaking of which, I never thought I would have a chance to fight in the Far East..."

Sharing his poignant thoughts, he looked at his prided knights.

Currently, these Legions were demonstrating his signature formation in the clear blue sky. First of all, three hundred of the thousand Legions had turned into *archers* and ascended in altitude.

These archers were not equipped with the standard Legion weapon of the bayonet rifle.

All three hundred archers were wielding *longbows*. This was the new weapon granted to them by Edward's prided special ability, the Feat of Arms—Archers of Crécy.

Indeed, it was just like how the Chevalier at the Suruga tutelary fort had bestowed *Japanese swords* to his subordinates.

Furthermore, Edward's wyvern mount was flying gracefully, a kilometer away from his prided knights. He had determined there was no need for him to be commanding the army at the forefront.

"In the past, I have won glorious victories at the hill of Crécy and the land of Poitiers. Let the world know that Japan has now joined this list... My fate has truly been unpredictable."

After increasing their elevation, the three hundred archers remained in their position in the sky.

They were roughly four hundred meters above the surface of Lake Ashi. The remaining seven hundred Garter Knights encircled the archers.

However, their altitude was a hundred meters lower than the archers.

This situation was very similar to "setting up archers on a hill in advance while concentrating cavalry at the base to defend the entire hill."

Edward was very good at this type of "mode anglais" formation.

"Prince, there appears, to be remnants."

"Oh?"

Edward heard a warning in his ear.

There was a small doll sitting on Edward's shoulder. A young girl's voice came from its mouth.

The doll was a blonde girl dressed in a sailor outfit, small in size yet extremely intricate in construction. Possessing it was the genie Morrigan of the British armed forces.

Edward himself had also noticed the noesis. He looked at the direction he had detected it.

...South of Lake Ashi, there was a location named Hakone Pass.

Located was Hakone's second tutelary fort, a stronghold with star-shaped fortification walls, known in Imperial Japan as "Goryōkaku Fortress" style.

From the second tutelary fort, thirty-two Japanese Legions, the Kamuys, flew into the sky.

They were targeting the thousand Garter Knights in formation over Lake Ashi...

"This type of offensive is known as 'kamikaze' in Japan, isn't it?"

"Looks like it."

The commander and the genie's conversation ended here.

Unfazed, Edward had his wyvern descend. Flying swiftly over the surface of Lake Ashi, he went northeast.

In the water near the coast here was a red torii.

It was supposed to be the entrance to a Japanese Shinto shrine—Hakone Shrine—and a famous symbol.

When Edward spotted it earlier, he was drawn to the torii's exotic appeal and had decided to have a good look later.

The Black Prince was already impatient to go sightseeing. A battle erupted overhead.

...The thirty-two blue Kamuys charged in full force at the British Empire's black army.

...The Garter Knights in charge of interception was a team of roughly a hundred, on standby at low altitude.

...The two sides exchanged fire with their bayonet rifles.

...However, the archers also drew their bows at the same time. These three hundred black knights had set up their formation higher in the sky to overlook all of Hakone. The steel longbows in their left hands were extremely large, almost longer than the eight-meter height of Legions.

...Next, an arrow of light appeared simultaneously in each of the three hundred archers' right hands.

...The Kamuys locked in a shootout with the black knights at low altitude—i.e. the Kamuys whose advance was impeded—became the targets of the pitch-black archers firing in full force from a higher position.

...Like a shower of rain, the arrows of light mercilessly pierced the thirty-two Kamuys.

...Against the English arrows, the blue Japanese troop's protective barriers were as weak as paper.

...In merely a minute or two, the remnants of the Hakone defense force were all wiped out—

"There is no fun in fighting excessively weak enemies."

Edward muttered to himself, watching Imperial Japan's Legions die loyally.

He had effortlessly conquered the impregnable Hakone Checkpoint.

This was an amazing feat of victory, but Edward found little glory

in it. He had simply led his army to attack the Hakone defense force, defeating them in a frontal assault, that was all.

It was merely a victory of brute force, relying on Chevalier Strength and elite troops.

Having demonstrated the capability of defeating an enemy army six times bigger than his own, the Black Prince would be embarrassed to brag about such a small victory...

As his thoughts reached this point, the legendary prince smiled wryly and said, "No, it was all thanks to God's blessing and the soldiers' valor that total victory was achieved. I must now praise my knights for their glorious efforts and suppress my desire for a contest of strategy."

Edward refreshed his mindset and said to the little girl spirit's simulacrum on his shoulder, "Morrigan, could you perform a search for me?"

"Please state."

"I heard that Hakone has been a popular spa area since ancient times. I'd like like to try a Japanese hot spring to erase the fatigue brought upon by battle. Help me find the hot spring with the best reputation."

"Understood. However."

"Is there a problem?"

"Yes. I would rather not, participate in... mixed bathing again."

"Hold on a second there. I swear upon my life that I am not a man who relies on a position of authority to make playthings out of young maidens. Besides, don't forget your body is a doll!"

"Objection. We high-level spirits, also have, human rights, more or less."

"Well, excuse me. Let me be clear with you. If anyone asked me if I preferred older or younger women, I definitely prefer older ladies!"

"I, see."

While Edward and his subordinate were chattering inconsequentially...

His wyvern mount was flying close to the surface of Lake Ashi. Instantly, the Black Prince keenly sensed noesis. There was faint but acute bloodlust aiming at his head.

"Please."

Edward issued a simple order.

Immediately, a Garter Knight appeared next to the flying wyvern.

From the coast of Lake Ashi flew an incoming rifle bullet. The deadly projectile fired from a sniper's rifle was blocked by the British Legion's armor.

The black Legion retaliated using its bayonet rifle.

The flash of light blasted away the mixed tenant building on the lakeside, preventing the enemy from ever following up the attack again.

Presumably, the shooter was part of Hakone's defense force and a very experienced sniper at that.

"Delighted to see me all alone, huh? ...What a mistake. Sniping never works against a powerful Chevalier."

Edward had not sensed any bloodlust or noesis until the last second.

Furthermore, the enemy had fired an accurate headshot at a flying target from across a windy lake surface.

These points added up to show that an outstanding sniper was at work. Even so, the enemy already made a mistake the moment they thought sniping would work against a Chevalier of Edward's caliber. Had the target been a Japanese Chevalier lacking in practical combat experience or greenhorns among the British knights, the story would be different...

Even if Edward was enjoying his sightseeing and looked very relaxed, instantly returning to a battlefield mindset was not difficult. That was the kind of man he was.

Also of note, the Charter of Chivalry laid down many rules forbidding armed forces from attacking civilian structures. However, civilian structures used for military objectives were considered exceptions, which was why the retaliatory shot just now was totally legitimate.

"Oh right, that katana-using Chevalier I saw at Suruga last time... He demonstrated the same ability too."

A few days ago, Edward had come across "a man that was undoubtedly a strong foe."

Recalling that brief encounter, Edward grinned fearlessly. Apart from that man, Generalissimo Caesar was going to come to Japan from the Eastern Roman Empire eventually too.

Indeed, true war had hardly begun. This was only the prelude.

Part 4

It was the evening after Masatsugu took a ride on Rikka's car to the Suruga tutelary fort.

He and his liege, Shiori, had returned together to the Black Lily Dorm.

Although it was called a dorm, the whole building was reserved for the princess' exclusive use. Dressed in *Haikara-san* style with an apron on top, Hatsune was preparing dinner.

The menu included dried horse mackerel, turnip salad, boiled hijiki, pickles, rice, and miso soup.

After the simple dinner, Masatsugu and Shiori were alone. The two of them went to the reading room, which served as a sort of small library for boarders.

However, the princess simply stared at books on the shelves without speaking the whole time.

Masatsugu broke the silence.

"Is it possible that you're upset?"

"Of course not. What reason do I have to be upset?" Shiori replied instantly.

Her speech was quite rapid with an air of displeasure. Masatsugu went "I see," shrugged and did not say anything more.

Now the princess' expression really looked unhappy.

In public, Shiori always upheld her image of the gentle princess. It was only in front of Masatsugu that she expressed her sincerest emotions, sulking or losing her temper on reflex.

"But you've been unhappy ever since we left the tutelary fort. I was wondering whether the fall of Hakone was the reason you're upset."

"Of course not." Shiori shook her head immediately. "In order for the Restoration Alliance to march into Kantō, the first choke point is Hakone. I knew the situation would inevitably turn out this way, though the unexpected speed of their offense did surprise me... But this is no cause for me to be upset."

"In other words, you are upset from other reasons? Ah."

Masatsugu figured it out. Nodding, he said, "Then you are upset because Akigase-dono and I are too close?"

"!?"

Masatsugu went straight to the point, causing the surprised Shiori to deny angrily, "Please do not suggest anything so preposterous!"

"All other reasons are unlikely. As your knight, Princess, I have been having friendly conversations with another girl to develop a relationship of mutual honesty. Witnessing that, you cannot help but feel jealous—This is the most convincing motive."

"M-Masatsugu-sama!"

"That is why you've been upset this whole time."

"You are mistaken. I have remained calm all this time!"

The shaken Shiori denied firmly. Then replied in a kind of assertive tone, completely different in attitude from her usual gentleness or feigned docility.

"Putting this aside, Masatsugu-sama, we have yet to *do it* today, have we? Let us go over there."

The princess' beautiful face was blushing.

Despite the heightened emotions in her heart, her tone was still relatively calm.

The two of them went to the table in the center of the reading room. Like the ones used in the school, the table was mundane office furniture. There were four pipe chairs next to it.

Of course, this furniture was meant for boarding students to study and do homework.

Ignoring the books, Masatsugu and Shiori sat down at the table together.

Shiori quietly extended her right hand and caressed Masatsugu's left hand. Their overlapping hands were perfectly hidden under the table.

"A high school couple keeping their relationship a secret, meeting in the library for a tryst, discreetly holding hands—"

What they were doing was very similar to that.

However, this was a necessary ritual. Unable to replenish ectoplasmic fluid the normal way, Tachibana Masatsugu had to rely on the mystic power found in Chevaliers or the kin of sacred beasts —

Masatsugu's body was very cold, almost akin to a state of hypothermia.

A chronic shortage of ectoplasmic fluid resulted in his body's lack of warmth. However, Shiori stroked Masatsugu's hand gently, trying to share her body warmth with him.

Doing this was effective.

The elegant and beautiful princess was transmitting warmth and mystic power through her palm.

Ever since their oath of fealty, they had been doing this secretly every day.

"On further thought, Hatsune knows about my memory loss too," Masatsugu muttered to himself. "We don't need to be secretive about this anymore."

"No! This must not be witnessed by others no matter what, it is too embarrassing..."

Shiori rejected the suggestion and bowed her head in shame.

During this time, she continued to stroke Masatsugu's hand gently. Their bodies were also leaning tightly against each other.

Undeniably, they currently looked like a very loving couple.

It came as no surprise that a maiden inexperienced in love would feel shy. Masatsugu understood the princess' misgivings and accepted her good intentions.

"Incidentally, Masatsugu-sama."



While continuing to warm up her knight, Shiori said, "Please do not ever speak so imprudently again as you did just now. I was honestly not upset and I would like you to refrain from arbitrary speculation about my thoughts."

"Was I mistaken? Sorry about that."

The princess' stubborn response was too adorable, what was he going to do with her—?

Harboring these disrespectful thoughts, Masatsugu apologized calmly.

"By the way, regarding Hakone..."

Holding Masatsugu's hand, Shiori changed the subject.

"The serious issue here is the fall of the impregnable Hakone in less than half a day. More worrying is—"

"The enemy commander's name?"

"Yes. When it comes to the British Empire's prided Resurrectees, there is none more prominent than Admiral Horatio Nelson, who managed to corner even Emperor Napoleon of France, whose name is synonymous to hero... He is a splendid and famous commander. And here in the land of Hakone, a hero of his equal has shown up."

The young knight had led an army of pitch-black Crusades, one thousand strong.

Those Legions were reportedly known as Knights of the Garter. The Feat of Arms transforming their bayonet rifles into longbows was named after the land of Crécy.

Combining all these reports, it was not difficult to deduce their commander's identity as Edward the Black Prince.

"To be honest, I've never heard of him."

"Neither have the majority of Japanese people. Of the ones who have, most merely would have read the name in a history textbook, nothing more. However, he is a legendary hero known to everyone in England."

Shiori smiled to hide her worries and explained the origins of the one bearing that name.

"As an English prince, he defeated the armies of France many times. In the end, he succumbed to illness, dying before he could succeed to the throne..."

Masatsugu only knew the man's name and a brief profile.

However, he was certain it was *him*. The night he repelled the Restoration Alliance, he had seen a silver-haired young man, riding a British wyvern.

The knight from that encounter must surely have been Prince Edward.

Perhaps this was a Resurrectee's instinct. Masatsugu felt inexplicably certain.

Chapter 2 - Soldiers of Fortune

Part 1

The First Expeditionary Brigade of the Far East Fleet.

These were the British Empire's armed forces led by Edward the Black Prince.

The Anglo-Japanese Restoration Alliance was formed from this brigade and Imperial Japan's Kinai Fiefdom.

The combat units attacking Tōkaidō were manned half-half by the British and the Kinai provincial army. However, the majority of Chevaliers were British and 80% of the Legions were Crusades.

Kinai knights were treated as "honored guests" and seldom sent to the battlefield.

Control was held fully in the British Empire's hands.

"There is a proverb in Japan... Lend them some eaves and they will take the main house, was it?"

Lieutenant Colonel Grayson muttered.

"The description aptly captures our relationship with the Kinai Fiefdom."

The elderly gentleman of a soldier was speaking solemnly with polite tones.

However, there was a hint of sardonic bite in his words. This old man was always sharing his cynicism with a completely straight face. Perhaps he was the role model responsible for the genie Morrigan's harsh tongue?

Edward kept his guess to himself and said, "Why not? The Kinai's top brass have accepted it too."

"Indeed, thanks to the blessings of the Three Lions and the British royal family."

"Well said. When they provide incredible and convenient miracles from time to time, we'd better perform our duties as loyal subjects to the best of our ability."

"The Kinai Governor General must have been moved by our princess' sincerity and grandeur."

With straight faces, they were exchanging false platitudes.

The young medieval prince and the elderly man of the modern twentieth century both smirked at the same time.

"Well then, Grayson, I must head over to Kyoto to cheer up our princess and handle a few sundry tasks while I am there. I am counting on you to hold the fort."

"Affirmative."

The elderly soldier accepted Edward's request like an experienced butler.

Also serving as the captain of the destroyer *Tintagel*, Grayson was dressed in a naval officer's uniform of a white shirt and tie with black pants. However, his current assignment was not on the ship.

Instead, it was *Hakone Checkpoint* in the western part of Japan's Kantō region.

As the commanding officer Edward's adjutant, he must first secure their control of the Hakone area to serve as a forward operating base to advance on Tōkaidō. This was his latest job.

The purpose was to build up a foundation to support invasions into Tokyo and the Kantō region, the heart of Imperial Japan.

"How will you travel to Kyoto?"

"First along the sea then entering Kinai through the Shima Peninsula."

Today was the second day after the fall of Hakone.

There was a helipad at the second tutelary fort, located south of Lake Ashi.

Hakone was originally defended by the Kantō provincial army. After conquering the tutelary forts, the British forces claimed the large transport helicopter of American make that was there. The helicopter was currently ready at the helipad.

Furthermore, British and Kinai forces had been assigned to various positions at Hakone.

The plan was to subjugate military and administrative facilities and demand civilian factions to provide "voluntary assistance."

After Edward's return, the hectic situation should subside somewhat. The capabilities of the veteran Grayson and the First Expeditionary Brigade were beyond reproach.

Their commander, the Resurrectee, still had other duties to fulfill.

Just as Edward walked to the helicopter, a young girl called out to him.

"Prince, if it pleases you, kindly take this along."

It was a blonde little girl in a sailor outfit and beret—Or rather, a doll.

The doll possessed by the genie Morrigan was standing behind Grayson.

The doll stood at 150cm, roughly human in size. In her hand was a figure version of her that Edward had used during the Hakone siege.

Every time she moved her body, the joints would produce noise, hinting of her non-human identity.

"Morrigan, there is no need for you to accompany me this time."

A genie's support made everything convenient, but Edward still declined.

"You should focus on the Hakone mission."

"Not a, problem. I am a high-level spirit. Simulacra can be sent to multiple locations... Multitasking, is possible."

"I know, but playing with dolls is not my thing."

Early twenties in appearance, Edward sighed.

"If I keep bringing your small version around with me, I am afraid weird rumors will start springing up."

"Please, relax. According to research conducted by the British forces... Many adult men in Imperial Japan, enjoy this type of doll."

"I am not looking for fellow enthusiasts here!"

The spirit offered her counsel expressionlessly but Edward rebuked her and boarded the helicopter alone.

Thus an air journey began. An ancient person from the fourteenth century was sitting in a block of metal to soar the sky. To be honest, Edward found riding a wyvern to be quite similar to a horse so it did not feel weird.

That being said, mechanized locomotion was not bad too.

After all, speed was one major advantage. The transport helicopter flew from Hakone to the air over Numazu Port, passing through Suruga Bay to enter Pacific Ocean airspace.

Then the helicopter went west along Japan's island coastline.

The British armed forces had established naval superiority over virtually all of Tōkaidō's offshore region—from Nagoya and the Atsumi Peninsula to Izu and Atami.

Chances of being attacked were very low. In the event that an enemy showed up, he could simply engage using Legions.

Edward enjoyed the leisurely flight.

The seats in the transport helicopter were hard and not very comfortable. However, horse riding consumed even more energy, so taking a helicopter was still more relaxing.

They entered Kinai through the Shima Peninsula then went north, in other words, inland.

A few hours after taking off, the helicopter reached the sky over Kyoto City. Prior to Japan's name change to "Imperial Japan," Kyoto had been the ancient capital where the royal palace was located.

This was Edward's second time in Kyoto.

Before the Tōkaidō invasion operation, he had disguised himself as a foreign tourist to visit this place and hold talks with key figures in the Kinai Fiefdom.

"Kyoto is such a cramped city..."

Edward's mode of locomotion had switched from a military helicopter to a black luxury vehicle.

As before, operation of the vehicle was left to the driver. Although Edward was talented at controlling mounts such as wyverns or horses, he was not good at handling mechanical contraptions.

Fortunately, as a Resurrectee and Chevalier, he would never find himself without a driver to use.

In the afternoon of the same day, Edward was in the back seat of the luxury vehicle, a paragon of elegance as befitted his title of prince, looking out quietly at the streets of Kyoto.

"Surrounded by mountains, narrow roads. Well, I don't dislike the atmosphere."

Kyoto was rich in classic Japanese tradition, but was not a major metropolis.

Nijou Castle, constructed on Tokugawa Ieyasu's orders, had been remodeled many times over the years. Nowadays, in the twentieth

century, it was being used by the Kinai Fiefdom as a "palace."

In addition, there was Kyoto Gyoen, a vast garden belonging to the imperial family.

Inside was a palace from a past age where predecessors of the imperial family had lived and old houses that served as "official residences" of the ancient privileged class, a reminder that this place used to be the political center of Japan.

Edward disembarked near Kyoto Gyoen.

He wanted to march through the streets gallantly in military uniform and relive his glorious adolescence as a knight in the past... However, he was dressed in casual clothing today.

A white shirt with black pants and a gray coat on top, rather plain in appearance.

With the British Empire's invasion of Tōkaidō under way, the position of an Englishman living in Japan would be rather awkward. Given such an environment, there was no need to go around in military uniform to attract extra attention.

Yet here in Japan, the appearance of a tall and handsome silver-haired man still made him stand out.

His conspicuousness could not be helped. Like a soldier, he walked with his head up and chest out, unfazed by the gazes of Kyoto's residents.

Soon, he reached an old-fashioned western mansion.

It was said that an American had ordered its construction in the Meiji period—during the nineteenth century.

Rather than the Kinai Fiefdom's Nijou Castle, today he was visiting a special person whose temporary residence was here. Ten-odd minutes later, Edward was in the mansion's reception room, keeping his appointment with the lady in question.

"Greetings, Princess. It is surely the blessings of the Three Lions that

have allowed me the good fortune of surviving combat to meet you once again."

"No, this fortune stems from your personal capability, good brother."

The girl's blonde hair reached waist length. She was smiling elegantly.

It would not be an exaggeration to compare her delicate and lovely facial features to that of a goddess. That being said, her temperament would not match Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty.

Strictly speaking, she would bear a greater resemblance to Hecate, the goddess of the moon shrouded in transient darkness.

Hecate was the terrifying progenitor of black magic, an ominous deity with significance as the guardian of witches.

"It has been a while, Black Prince. I am sincerely delighted for the chance to see you again."

The beautiful Princess Eleanor greeted him.

She was wearing a one-piece dress with puffy sleeves. Fashionably black, its texture was reminiscent of a witch's black robe.

The two of them were sitting in a sofa in the reception room.

Edward went straight to the point, "I heard you were hurt. Thank goodness it was nothing serious."

"You should know that with the powers granted by my father—the sacred lion sovereign—healing minor wounds poses no challenge..."

At Edward's request, Princess Eleanor had infiltrated the Suruga tutelary fort.

It had happened only five days ago, an operation aiming to recruit Chevalier Akigase Rikka, the eldest daughter of the Tōkaidō Governor General, by putting a "charm curse" on her.

However, the operation failed and Akigase Rikka stabbed Eleanor with a sword, forcing her to flee for her life.

Her stabbed left shoulder already showed no signs injury, recovering in merely five short days, but Edward shook his head and said, "Princess, I am quite aware of the source of your miracles. However, we should not abuse *powers that require a price to use*."

"Indeed, I shall take your words to heart."

Princess Eleanor nodded obediently. Smiling, she said, "However, making progress without relying on the blessings of miracles would require superior guile and competence. Good brother, I look forward to the fruits of your labors."

"Understood, I will commit this to memory," Edward replied with a wry smile to the princess who addressed him as "brother."

"First of all, I need to meet the Kinai Governor General, is that so?"

"Arrangements are all in place. I *made* him cancel his entire schedule for tomorrow."

"Hey, a princess of the British Empire should not be speaking like this. He is going to be the prime minister of Imperial Japan eventually, so remember your manners."

"Well... My apologies. I was imprudent." Eleanor widened her eyes ostentatiously and said mischievously, "Please forgive me for speaking so unladylike. Allow me to change my wording. Thanks to the Governor General's kindness and generosity, he is willing to set aside time to meet you, good brother."

"Now that is our good princess. Next... How to best handle the matter of reinforcements?"

Edward recalled a certain handsome man's face.

It was the young man he had spotted that night when he sent the Kinai Chevaliers to attack Suruga.

"The war effort is expected to progress mostly within expectation. I

heard that negotiations with Tōsandō are in good shape. However.. Some unexpected elements have surfaced. As a precaution, it would be best to reassign a few obedient knights from Australia."

"...Why not reassign personnel from Britain?"

"I would rather not. *That man* happens to be sitting back home in boredom. Even now, he still cannot shake off his mindset from the medieval Crusade campaigns. He even wanted to take my spot and head to Japan personally. However, history has proven him unsuitable in the role of top commander."

Edward spoke elegantly as a knight to express some of his dissatisfaction.

"Consequently, the decision to send me was swiftly confirmed. If he were to come, it would make my job very difficult. News of this must not reach Britain. Well, I do concede that he is very charismatic as a general."

In all of English history, that man could very well be the most valorous *king*.

The drawback was that he was hard to use.

Edward shrugged and said, "Simply stated, I would rather find an excellent hound than put a collar on a rampaging lion."

"My condolences, good brother."

"...What do you mean by that?"

"Richard strongly petitioned the higher-ups in the military. The gist of it went along the lines of 'It is my greatest wish to render assistance to Edward, my kin of blood. Please be generous and understand my chivalry.' He is expected to arrive at the Port of Kobe today."

"...I was not informed of this at all."

"He rushed off and departed England during the night before the commander-in-chief—Admiral Nelson—gave authorization. This

forced the higher-ups' hand, leaving them no choice but to authorize dispatching him to Japan."

"Damn them for foisting the burden of taming the lion upon me..."

Edward's noble and handsome face instantly turned gloomy.

While Black Prince Edward and Princess Eleanor were conversing...

The large British destroyer *Camelot* was sailing towards Osaka Bay. Measuring 180m in length, it was the sister ship of the *Tintagel* managed by the genie Morrigan.

This military ship was about to reach the Port of Kobe in Kinai.

Under the sunny sky, a man was standing alone on deck, enjoying the sea breeze.

His fine blond hair fluttered in the wind like a lion's mane. His muscular body was clad in Britain's black military uniform... That was not all.

On top of that, he was wearing a flashy crimson cape, giving an impression of excessive accessorizing.

"My boy Édouard... will surely be in for a big surprise when he sees me."

Laughing to himself, this man was around forty years of age. His countenance was full of majesty.

He was probably the only person in the contemporary world who would refer to the Black Prince as "Edward." Despite being the King of England in the past, he did not feel bound to using the English language or following British norms.

"Having lead an army of crusaders to besiege Acre in the past, I now head to the island nation of the Far East to demonstrate knightly justice... Oh how my blood boils in excitement."

Reciting the name of an ancient city east of the Mediterranean, he

quietly ignited his battle spirit.

At the same time, his body released noesis. This vast amount expanded and naturally took physical form in the atmosphere amid the sea breeze.

An army of British Legions appeared in the sky over the destroyer *Camelot* as it sailed into Osaka Bay.

A total of two hundred Legions, but this was not all of them. This puny number was definitely not his limit. His Chevalier Strength was not that weak.

"O wind of the Far East, mark my words. I, Richard, shall step foot in Japan. Let the name of Coeur de Lion shake the world once more. Behold my way of life!"

His voice was filled with the elation of a narcissist.

They were identical in appearance to the British mainstay legion, the Crusade.

However, the color was totally different. These Legions were crimson from head to foot. They were also equipped with bayonet rifles larger than that of typical Legions, with ornate decorations as well.

The master said to this army of crimson Crusades, "Thank you, my swords. Present to me a Feat of Arms worthy of the name of Escalibor."

In legend, King Arthur of England was served by the Knights of the Round Table.

The name Escalibor was equivalent to the "Excalibur" that appeared in the stories of King Arthur.

This man had named his Legions after the legendary king's magic sword. Known as Richard I in English history, his nickname of the Lionheart was also very famous.

Richard was a knight of outstanding martial prowess and a rare general of incomparable ferocity.

At the same time, he was the King of England in the twelfth century and the Black Prince Edward's forefather.

Part 2

It was precisely a week ago when the Crusades first attacked Suruga.

Seven days later, it was Friday again. During this time, Suruga's surroundings were blockaded by the Restoration Alliance's military forces, preventing the flow of traffic and information.

Even so, the Suruga side sent out dozens of retainer beasts as scouts.

Isolated behind enemy lines, the Suruga tutelary fort still succeeded in obtaining limited intelligence.

"...In the end, it's all unfavorable news." Hatsune frowned and fell into deep thought.

Hakone Checkpoint had fallen the day before yesterday. The main roads and part of the railway infrastructure running from Shizuoka Prefecture to Aichi and Yamanashi had also been damaged by the Restoration Alliance's Legions, rendered unusable. Given the current situation, timely repairs would be difficult.

That was not all of the bad news.

"The effects of Hakone Checkpoint's capitulation are more severe than expected," Princess Shiori lamented the unfavorable situation, her voice beautiful as always.

The intelligent princess was accompanied by her lady-in-waiting, Hatsune, and knight, Masatsugu, at Rinzai High's open-air cafe. Noon had just gone by and school was out. Due to the unusual times they were in, all lessons were on a half-day schedule.

"Rikka-sama's father, the Tōkaidō Governor General... has apparently propositioned the Tōsandō Fiefdom to join forces in resistance and drive out the Restoration Alliance from Shizuoka and Hakone."

"The two fiefdoms are very close together geographically, after all."

Hatsune recalled a map showing the center of the islands of Japan.

Tōkaidō was the "sea road," comprising the regions of Aichi, Shizuoka, and Yamanashi facing the Pacific Ocean.

Directly on top was Tōsandō, the "mountain road" of the Southern Alps covering the areas of Gifu, Nagano, Gunma, and Tochigi, the region of precipitous mountains known as the backbone of Japan's islands.

If the "mountain and sea" fiefdoms of central Japan were to join forces and Kantō cooperated...

However, Shiori sighed repeatedly and ruled out this scenario.

"Unfortunately, Tōkaidō has not secured Tōsandō's support. I fear that the military strength demonstrated by the British in conquering Hakone within half a day, combined with signs that the western fiefdoms are not opposed to the Restoration Alliance, has prompted them to take a wait and see approach."

"Intimidated so easily, what cowards they are."

"Or rather, the British side did their part well," replied Masatsugu quietly to Hatsune's comment.

"Intimidation before and after a war is very important. It's ideal to make the opponent think that resistance is futile and provoke them to imagine what they stand to lose in defeat. Sufficient intimidation, like this instance, could cause future enemies to surrender or obey without a fight."

"Indeed, the Restoration Alliance most likely chose their targets in consideration of the publicity effect." Shiori agreed with Masatsugu's view. "They swiftly took down Shizuoka and Hakone, thus causing western Japan and Tōsandō to lean towards supporting the Alliance. Conversely, had they started out by attacking Nagoya or Tokyo—major metropolises with plenty of Chevaliers and Legions—they probably would not have obtained such impressive results."

The intelligent princess added cynically, "Of course, it is possible that the Restoration Alliance and the Tōsandō Fiefdom have a secret agreement."

".....Okay."

The elegant lady Hatsune served and the Onii-sama from the Tachibana clan were talking military strategy.

Hatsune made her decision. She did not have enough experience or insight to contribute to this discussion. In that case, she would swiftly obtain "power" by making the most of her own signature talents, making the most of the signature talents featured in the Tachibana clan with its abundance of heroes.

"Princess and Onii-sama, I have decided." Hatsune suddenly stood up, clenched her fist and declared, "Here and now, I will start the succession ritual!"

"Eh? Now? Here? Straight away?"

"Yes, there is no point hesitating any longer. A woman is measured by courage!"

"Really? Good luck then."

Contrasting with the princess' surprise, Masatsugu's attitude remained unchanged.

Hatsune could not help but grumble, "Onii-sama, can't you shed a few tears of encouragement at least?"

"You're the one carrying out the ritual after all. Whether I cry or not, the result still depends on your ability. I've got nothing to say except good luck."

"Fair enough, I got it."

Hatsune accepted it without a fuss. After all, she was born and raised in a clan filled with unruly larger-than-life characters. Even as a girl, she was deeply influenced by the clan's bold and unfettered ways.

"Then wait for me with anticipation as though you're watching a horse race!"

"Understood."

"Hatsune, even as a member of royalty, I do not have the authority to hinder another person's aspirations to become a Chevalier." Solemnity returned to Shiori's beautiful face. Gazing at Hatsune, she said, "Because it is the spirit of loyalty and righteousness of people like you that has secured the military power of the Kamuy. I feel nothing but endless gratitude for this courage... However, please allow me to issue you an unreasonable command on this occasion."

The princess sighed and said assertively, "I have no wish to become a guest at your funeral. Show me success, whatever it takes."

"Don't worry, Princess. I will carry out your command without fail!"

Of course, the ritual could not actually take place at the open-air cafe.

The school dojo happened to be free, so Hatsune decided to use it. The martial arts clubs, most notably judo and kendo, had all currently suspended their activities.

Hatsune entered the dojo alone and knelt down in seiza on the tatami floor.

Her usual *Haikara-san* outfit consisting of meisen kimono and hakama did not look out of place in a Japanese dojo at all.

The blue scroll placed in front of her was the Tachibana clan's cherished treasure.

The manifestation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Appellation. Hatsune remained in seiza in front of it and took a deep breath, gazing intently at the scroll.

Her surrogate brother Masatsugu and the princess were waiting outside. She could rely on no one but herself.

"I beseech the Appellation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune. Pray grant me the authorizing seal of warfare to become a war god to defend Imperial Japan—Show yourself and let's fight!"

Hatsune recited the oath she had learned, issuing a challenge at the end.

She forcefully grabbed the scroll in front of her and her vision went dark immediately.

...When her eyesight recovered, she was no longer in the dojo.

She was outdoors. Since there was a starry sky overhead, it was evidently the middle of the night.

"I-I'm on a bridge?"

Within an instant, Hatsune had been taken to an unfamiliar place.

Currently, Hatsune was standing on a wooden bridge over a river.

The river was not big or impressive. It was not flowing rapidly either. Most notably, the water was very clear. A boy was standing a few meters ahead of her.

The boy looked roughly twelve-years-old. The beauty of his face was breathtaking.

Like Hatsune, he was dressed in traditional Japanese clothing. A kimono of the Heian period, it was commonly known as the *kariginu* meaning "hunting cloak," or in other words, the outfit that onmyouji would wear for ease of movement.

"It has been so long since anyone visited here..."

The boy examined Hatsune coldly.

His facial features were delicate, making him resemble a young and pretty girl at first glance. He was also very slim in build. However, no one would ever mistake him for a girl.

His voice and expression was very manly and exceptionally

arrogant.

"Needless to say, you know my name, right? If you don't, I can't be bothered to tell you either."

"Ushiwakamaru..."

Hatsune said Yoshitsune's childhood name instead of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune.

According to one legend, during childhood, this hero had shown up at Gojō Bridge in Kyoto, calling himself Ushiwakamaru, and defeated Musashibō Benkei who had been on a quest to collect a thousand weapons—

Come to think of it, the river below the bridge would be the Kamogawa.

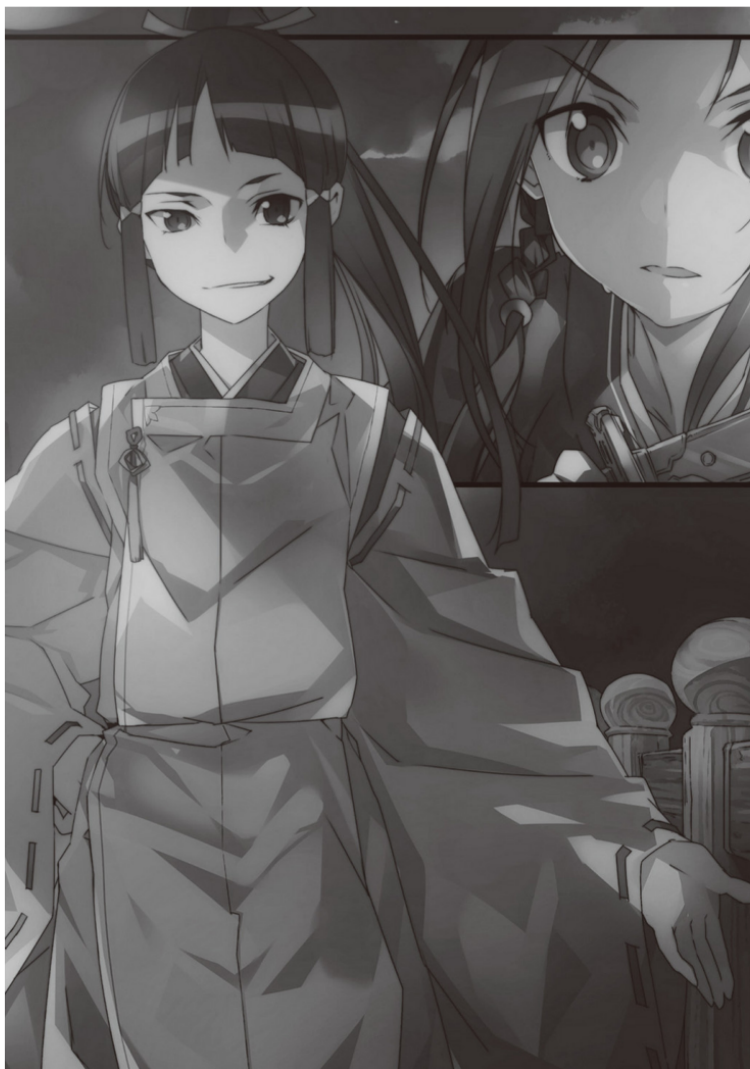
Hatsune had visited Kyoto on a school trip. She recalled scenery from the ancient city.

"You must first prove your worth if you want my help."

"My worth?"

"You pass if you defeat me... As much as I'd like to say that, it's impossible for you. Let's say you pass if you can *catch* me."





What the other party wanted was for Hatsune to demonstrate her fighting ability. Fighting was precisely one of the Tachibana clan's specialties. Just as Hatsune was about to dash forward, the pretty boy laughed proudly.

"I'll lend you this, lass. Cut me down if you can."

"Ehhh!?"

There was a tachi on the waist of the boy named Ushiwakamaru.

Its blade was over two feet long and quite curved. A Japanese sword dating to the latter years of the Heian period.

The boy grabbed the tachi whose length did not suit his small stature and tossed it to Hatsune, scabbard included. Hatsune hastily caught it in both hands.

Hatsune could feel the tachi's heavy weight on her arms.

"You're underestimating me too much... Of course, it's possible that I, Tachibana Hatsune, am no match for the peerless Minamoto no Yoshitsune, but I'm no pushover either!"

Hatsune encouraged herself with a bold declaration.

Simply facing him was enough for her to sense how difficult an opponent he was.

The boy in front of her was undoubtedly a thousand times stronger than she was. Against such an opponent, were her own martial arts really going to work?

Suppressing the uncertainty in her heart, Hatsune decided she must not lose in spirit and verbal vigor at least.

"You can use a weapon too. I won't complain."

"Don't worry, there is simply no such need. If I wanted to use one, I'd get one in an instant."

The unarmed pretty boy even scoffed in disdain.

He really seemed to be looking down at Hatsune, though he definitely had the strength to back up his attitude. Hatsune gulped nervously.

Part 3

Who was this pretty boy who looked like Ushiwakamaru?

Besides, where was this place? Hatsune believed that her "simple" personality, capable of easily ignoring these questions, was her strength.

A terrifying trial was about to begin. These trivial details were inconsequential.

How to teach this arrogant boy a lesson was what she really should think about.

"I'd be a disgrace to my Tachibana ancestors if I allowed this relic to remain buried in obscurity."

Hatsune drew out the tachi he had given her.

Excessive trust in the opponent's goodwill would be very dangerous, so Hatsune swung the blade to test it.

The tachi felt fine to use. For example, if the rivet securing the tang was loose, the blade could slide out of the handle during a swing. Fortunately, there were no such problems.

Hatsune raised the tachi without worry.

Pointing the sword's tip at the handsome face of Ushiwakamaru (?), she said, "Let me test how good you are."

Then Hatsune dashed rapidly at the boy.

At the same time, she executed a lethal two-handed thrust, aimed to pierce the boy's beautiful face.

The opponent had lent his own weapon to Hatsune in a show of self-confidence. As a member of the Tachibana clan, Hatsune did not have the decency to show kindness to such an arrogant enemy. Reading Hatsune's offensive, the boy backed away to evade the

tachi's tip.

"I'm in no position to criticize others..." The pretty boy said with a wry smile, "For a lass, you really have quite the fierce temper."

"What are you talking about? Fights are won by preemptive strikes!"

In showdowns between master swordsmen, one seldom attacked lightly.

To avoid being counterattacked, there was a preference to let the opponent attack first, then find an opening to retaliate. This concept was known as *go no sen* in Japanese swordsmanship.

However, Hatsune had attacked right off the bat, everything be damned.

A lucky hit would have led to an immediate victory. This was also the principle of fighting with real swords.

"My clan hates biding time for an opening and not attacking."

"I actually agree on that point, but I think women should be a bit more demure."

"I've heard plenty of such nagging advice!"

While holding her own in the verbal exchange, Hatsune did not stop moving.

The boy had backed away and Hatsune chased after him.

Hatsune's high slash swept horizontally at the side of the boy's pretty face, but he evaded in the nick of time with a slight twist of his upper torso. Then Hatsune feigned an attack at his arm but actually executed a diagonal slash at his right shin. This strike was dodged too.

The boy moved sideways by an inch or so, once again evading with the slimmest of margins.

"Another one!"

"Hahaha. So here we have a vicious horse that kicks!"

Hatsune had switched to a low kick, intending to shatter the boy's kneecaps. The boy jumped back again, evading the kick.

So far, all her attacks had been one or two centimeters from striking the enemy.

Yet the boy was denying Hatsune success.

In addition to outstanding eyesight, he possessed animal-like speed and flexibility. Without natural talent, training alone would never attain this level of martial arts.

It would not be an exaggeration to compare his agile movements to a cat's or a monkey's. His reflexes and kinetic vision rivaled that of animals too.

"As expected of the Kurama tengu's disciple..."

As a young boy, Ushiwakamaru had mastered the arts of war under the tutelage of Kurama's great tengu.

Recalling the scene from noh theater, Hatsune used her own trump card.

Although it was not as lofty as "an ultimate secret technique," it was quite useful—

"Hiyahhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Oh?"

The pretty boy showed a change in expression when he lightly dodged Hatsune's horizontal slash.

He finally put away his irreverent attitude. After attacking the boy in a rapid succession of left and right diagonal slashes, Hatsune switched to stabbing at his heart with a single-handed thrust.

The boy evaded all attacks deftly without complacency in his countenance.

He was no longer flaunting his confidence by dodging attacks by the slimmest of margins. Instead, he maintained a distance of a few dozen centimeters to evade Hatsune's tachi.

"Your petty tricks are pretty amusing."

Glancing furtively at Hatsune's stance, the boy muttered to himself.

He was truly extraordinary to have seen through Hatsune's trick already. If Tachibana Hatsune was a sparrow chirping on a branch, he would be a phoenix soaring the sky. That was the massive disparity between them.

However, the disparity was not entirely impossible to bridge. It was too early to give up yet!

"How about this!?"

Hatsune entered a mid-level seigan stance, sweeping her sword at the boy sideways.

His defensive maneuver was even more impressive. Jumping swiftly in the air, he flew over Hatsune's slash lightly.

More unbelievably, he stepped on the tachi that was swinging towards him and leaped again from the back of the blade.

Then he ascended high into the air like a bird before somersaulting and landing behind Hatsune.

"!?"

"A pretty good idea. Too bad it doesn't work on me," said the boy casually.

Hatsune recalled a legend where Matsubayashi Henyasai, a master swordsman in the Edo period, had used a similar stunt.

Henya was a nickname that compared his speed and agility to a bat's.

"You jumped all over the place and confused that big guy Benkei

too..." Hatsune sneaked a quick glance at her hands holding the tachi.

The boy had lent her a tachi with a handle measuring thirty centimeters or so. During the series of offensives earlier, Hatsune had slightly adjusted her grip's position with every strike.

"This isn't enough. If even Musashibō Benkei's naginata failed to touch him."

Since the handle was thirty centimeters long, gripping the sword near the guard or towards the end would change the overall reach of the blade. Hence, Hatsune would slide along the handle before attacking, adjusting the position of her grip flexibly to make minor adjustments to the tachi's offensive reach.

This variability of ten-odd centimeters was surprisingly effective at disrupting an enemy's defensive instincts.

Experts with exceptional eyesight were especially sensitive to minute changes and thus even more easily affected. This was a practical combat technique that could only be used with a Japanese sword with a long handle.

Understanding their gap as martial artists, Hatsune licked her lips.

"Little lass, I will keep my earlier promise."

The pretty boy took out a fan from his bosom.

Rather than a metal fan with a steel frame, it was simply a Japanese paper fan. Without opening the fan, he stared at Hatsune.

"Wielding a sword against you would be a taint against my reputation. However, know that I, Kurou Yoshitsune, am on a completely different level when armed."

Finally introducing his name and title, the pretty boy ceased all movement.

With a sharp expression, the boy exuded a calm and collected aura as he observed Hatsune's every move. Hatsune was a bit miffed that

all he had taken out was a fan, but there was no helping that. Kurou Hougan had decided this was "plenty enough."

"Looks like I'll have to take a gamble and go all-out in offense..." Hatsune murmured and began to strategize.

However, all she could think of was what her friends had said. Masatsugu had said the final result ultimately depended on Tachibana Hatsune's own ability. The princess had commanded her to succeed without fail. Rikka believed that what truly mattered were one's battle achievements after becoming a Chevalier—

"Okay!"

Having made up her mind, Hatsune straightened her back.

Then she tossed away the tachi in her hand, dropping it into the river below the bridge.

"What the heck?"

"I can find a way without relying on this kind of thing."

Furthermore, she sat down cross-legged on the ground.

"Your turn to attack. I'm not going anywhere. Bring it on any time!"

"I never thought Japan would ever produce a idiot who'd brazenly speak to me like this."

The boy showed surprise but a smug smile surfaced on the corners of his lips.

The pretty boy with the name of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune approached with agile footwork. In front of Hatsune, he swung down the fan in his right hand with lightning speed.

The fan, a handicraft of wood and paper, struck Hatsune squarely on the head.

The sound of slicing could even be heard, normally not possible with a fan.

"Owww!?"

The violent impact shook Hatsune's skull and brain, making her see stars.

Unbelievably, a paper fan could inflict such a heavy blow. Truly a wondrous feat of peerless proportions. However, Hatsune mustered a Tachibana youngster's fortitude.

Hatsune imagined the fan swung down by Kurou Hougan's right arm as a katana.

She succeeded in executing a barehanded technique for countering an armed opponent. Hatsune had reasoned that her head or face would have been the most likely targets since the enemy was attacking her with a fan while she was sitting on the ground. Determined to grab his arm even at the cost of getting hit, she simply waited for him to come to her instead.

"Yahhhhhh!"

Hatsune leaned back, pulling Kurou Yoshitsune's right arm along while scissoring her legs around his shoulder region—

The boy almost fell over forwards. Thus, Hatsune was hanging on his arm.

Suspended in midair, Hatsune naturally fell. The instant her back hit the ground, she rolled, taking Kurou Yoshitsune with her. The two of them entered a state of ground fighting.

Applying pressure to his elbow joint, Hatsune executed a flying armbar.

The Ushiwakamaru version of Kurou Yoshitsune was small in stature. Besides, a fighter from the Heian period probably would have no knowledge of a flying surprise assault from Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Hatsune's correct call had created the opening for victory. However, her attack only succeeded halfway.

"Tsk!"

Before the joint was locked completely, Kurou Yoshitsune swung his right arm vigorously.

Hatsune had almost straightened his elbow but could not budge his arm any further. Despite a boy's appearance, Kurou Yoshitsune's arm strength was extraordinary. Hatsune could not overpower him no matter how hard she tried.

However, Hatsune said proudly, "How's that? This finally counts as catching you, right!?"

"Indeed, I cannot deny that," young Kurou replied unhappily.

"Yes!"

Knowing she had succeeded, Hatsune cried out in excitement. She happened to be executing ground skills on the bridge. Releasing the boy's right arm, she extended her limbs, simply lying on the ground in a star jump posture.

Her fatigue was intense but matched equally by her sense of accomplishment.

While Hatsune was lying there grinning to herself, Kurou Yoshitsune immediately stood up.

"By the way, I can't believe you dared to take my attack."

He glared down coldly at Hatsune with words of praise.

"Of course it was scary, but this ritual is ultimately just a test."

Although there is a risk of death, it was ultimately just a test—

Hatsune recalled Akigase Rikka's advice.

"By my guess, it shouldn't be too harsh. Besides, if you really wanted to kill me, you wouldn't use a fan, right?"

A paper fan could not kill, which was why Hatsune dared to take

the gamble.

Seeing Hatsune lying on the ground with a silly grin, the young Kurou went "I see."

"You really are an idiot."

"Hold it right there. Aren't you being way too rude to a lady—?"

Hatsune was about to protest when she jumped in surprise.

The young Kurou walked over to a railing on the bridge and swung the fan in his right hand. Struck by the fan, the thick timber crumbled and collapsed after tiny cracks appeared.

Also the destruction was confined to just that one spot.

This attack was more powerful and shocking than its appearance had suggested.

Hatsune slowly got up, staring at the tragic state of the railing.

"....."

"Whether I'm using a fan or a twig, I can easily shatter the skull of a little lass. I deliberately held back to see what ridiculous idea you were thinking about. Lass, you managed to pique my curiosity. It counts as your win."

"R-Really?"

"On further thought, idiots are less likely to be hit by stray arrows on the battlefield."

"Th-That's definitely a discriminatory remark! Jumping to conclusions is not nice!"

"Don't be too hasty to deny it. Despite being an idiot, indeed, you do have a smart side, which makes you a capable idiot. I shall render my assistance to you for the time being. Do your best."

After mocking Hatsune, the young Kurou's body gradually grew big.

This growth was not maturation but the expansion of body size. He turned into a winged giant soldier standing eight meters tall, very similar to the appearance of the Kamuy, Imperial Japan's mainstay Legion.

Similar, but not identical—

After watching the transformation to its conclusion, Hatsune lost consciousness.

When she woke up, Tachibana Hatsune found herself lying on the tatami floor in the dojo.

She had fallen asleep unintentionally. The blue scroll still clutched in her right hand was the manifestation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Appellation.

Furthermore, Hatsune felt it vaguely.

Inside the scroll was a strong will as well as a warrior's fierce emotions, thirsting for battle.

Inside her dream, she had met the general, Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune. This was proof that his mighty name had recognized the latest successor.

Part 4

"Present... ARMS!"

At the drill instructor's command, hundreds of soldiers performed the action neatly in unison.

They brought their light automatic rifles to a vertical position, muzzles upward, then performed the salute known as presenting arms.

This scene was taking place in the plaza within Nijou Castle, the Kinai Fiefdom's "palace."

A military band was playing a heroic melody, adding to the atmosphere of the ceremony.

The Kinai provincial army's elite guard were saluting to convey honor to a distinguished guest.

Throughout the Edo period, Nijou Castle had suffered several fires, destroying the central keep and various portions. However, reconstruction works were put into motion ten-odd years ago.

Thanks to that, today in the year 1998, one could still see Nijou Castle's full glory from the Kan'ei era.

This included the outer moat, the inner moat, the inner citadel, the outer citadel, the central keep, the courtyard, etc.

However, the interior of the buildings were outfitted with elevators and other facilities, remodeled into modern style.

Edward, the main guest at the honor ceremony, said, "Japan's generous hospitality is truly not bad at all."

It was noon on the second day of his visit to Kyoto.

The central keep was located on a towering stone wall. Edward was on a balcony there.

His vantage point provided a full view of the plaza inside the castle. Every time a ceremony was held, the Kinai Fiefdom's VIPs or visiting members of the imperial family would stand on this balcony to meet the civilians and soldiers of the province.

Today, Edward was wearing the British Empire's black military uniform, unlike yesterday.

Also, Edward was standing at "the forefront" of the balcony next to the railing. The Kinai Governor General, Izumi Tenzen, was standing a little further back.

"Sir Izumi, thank you for your warm hospitality."

"Not at all. This welcome reception is the least we could do for a knight from Britain, our ally, much less a *legatus legionis* from the ancient past."

Also a Chevalier, the Kinai Governor General was wearing the military officer's uniform of Imperial Japan.

In his sixties, the elderly man seemed to have kept up his martial training. Despite his advanced age, his body was quite strong and healthy. His hair was also black.

"Our nation will only have something called a future if we align our interests with Britain... One day, when the Empress at the imperial palace comes to understand this, I shall have you received as a state guest."

"Hahahaha, I will look forward to it."

The Kinai Governor General was very dignified at a glance with an imposing countenance.

Edward cordially responded to the empty promise. This old man had a reputation as a fierce general in Japan and was famous for being a militant.

...However, the British military knew the truth.

Despite his exalted position as a Chevalier, his experience in actual

combat was paltry. During the current operations, he had been accompanied by bodyguard Chevaliers under the pretext of adjutants. The reputation of the fierce general was a ruse. A vain man, even his black hair was the result of hair dye.

For this kind of man to serve as the British Empire's collaborator—He was definitely a good choice to exploit.

"Thank you for looking after my brother. I, Eleanor, offer my utmost gratitude."

The princess present, Eleanor, also curtsied elegantly.

Today, she was dressed in a white formal dress, looking very pure and lovely.

If one had to answer the question of whether it looked good on her, the answer was definitively yes. However, anyone who knew of Eleanor's true nature as a *witch* would feel some sense of dissonance from her attire.

The Kinai Governor General evidently did not gather that impression.

"The pleasure was all mine. As a demonstration of our friendship with your nation... as well as my respect for you, none of this was any trouble on our part."

"Oh dear, you flatter me so."

"Fighting on behalf of beautiful ladies is the chivalry espoused by your nation, isn't it? Princess of Britain. As a Japanese man, I would be delighted to learning the ways of chivalry for your sake. You are a woman worthy of my devotion."

The Kinai Governor General's sycophancy did not suit his imposing countenance very well.

His eyes were fixated upon Eleanor in fascination, like a young boy infatuated with an older woman, or a medieval knight who would pledge his life to a lady.

Edward observed sharply.

The *noesis* released from Eleanor's back was affecting the Kinai Governor General, entangling Izumi Tenzen's body—and noetic waves—like tentacles.

The old man, despite his position and honor, was worshipping a foreign maiden.

This noetic curse was precisely the witchcraft used by Eleanor.

Finding an appropriate moment, Edward excused himself from the balcony.

Since the Kinai Governor General's mind was fixated on Eleanor, it was fine for Edward to be absent. Walking alone in the corridor of Nijou Castle's central keep, he wondered if he should go sightseeing in the afternoon.

Unexpectedly, he ran into a displeased acquaintance.

"Hello Uncle, is there something upsetting you?"

"Indeed. My unhappiness is your fault, Édouard."

Edward's greeting elicited the expected response.

The other party was a man in his forties, dressed in the British military's black uniform with a red cape on top. He was Richard I, the Resurrectee who had left Britain on an expedition without permission.

"I took great pains to cross untold miles to render my assistance in battle, yet you did not even ask me to attend the ceremony... This would have been an excellent opportunity to let these orientals learn of my mighty name as the honored heroic king."

"It's better to keep a low profile so as to demonstrate valor in critical moments. I too have endured such a phase."

Richard the Lionheart was an imposing man.

However, he had a thoughtless side to him stemming from his intense urge of exhibitionism, an exaggerated sense of chivalry and romanticism, and a poet's soul in love with poetry.

Consequently, he was not suited to taking top command. Suitability as king was also tenuous too.

"Besides, Uncle, the forest has ears and the field has eyes."

Edward was quoting a proverb equivalent to the Japanese saying, "walls have ears."

"Otherwise, it would make things awkward for our British soldiers if they heard. We no longer live in an age when our *House of Plantagenet* ruled Great Britain. We must respect British customs and honor. Please try to shift away from *continental* mannerisms."

"Hmm..."

"It is time for Prince Edward and King Richard to retire."

From Richard's perspective, Edward was more like a descendant than merely someone younger in age.

Furthermore, Richard had a proud personality with a fiery temper. It would not be unexpected for someone like him to insist on his exalted position. However, the advice from someone a few generations his junior turned out to be surprisingly effective.

"Ho, since times have changed, I shall listen to you."

Richard displayed unexpected leniency towards his junior kin, the way a grandfather would indulge a grandson.

Edward nodded in response to the smiling Lionheart. He addressed him as "Uncle" merely out of convenience. Their true relationship was much more complicated than that.

Edward's *great-grandfather's grandfather* was Richard's younger brother.

Richard's younger brother was John Lackland, a notoriously

unpopular king in the history of England. Who would have expected his bloodline to produce a number of famous kings as well as a renowned general like Edward?

"Well then, let us take up the subject of war."

Trying to keep a fierce beast like Richard restrained would not work.

Unless given chances to vent as necessary, he was going to cause fatal chaos eventually. This worry was what prompted Edward to deliberately bring up his favorite subject.

"Hohohoho, is there a battlefield worthy of my presence?"

"Indeed, there is. I have some matters to handle in Kyoto first, but over in Tōkaidō that our forces are in the process of conquering, there is a large-scale counterattack being planned against the British —"

Now that the Lionheart was here, Edward had no choice but to accept his presence and make the best use out of him.

Moreover, even if he was ill-suited as ruler or top commander, at least he was far from incompetent. So long as the lion tamer was skillful, there were no lack of ways to deploy him.

As the commander-in-chief of the British forces invading Japan, Edward said, "Right now, we are laying a trap for them. If all goes well, Uncle, I will yield to you the chance to fight at the base of Mount Fuji."

Part 5

"...This is basically the etiquette for establishing a pact."

Akigase Rikka was in charge of instruction.

Tachibana Hatsune was the listener. Yesterday, she had inherited Kurou Yoshitsune's Appellation to become a new Chevalier.

"In the end, there is no method better than trying it out for real. Don't think too much, just feel with your body."

"Understood. By the way, Rikka-sama, has anyone ever called you a rough-and-ready person?"

"You're very perceptive. People who served as my adjutants or staff officers have complained about the same thing. So did my younger brothers at Nagoya."

"No wonder."

The two of them were conversing in the water shrine under the Suruga tutelary fort.

Hatsune had followed Rikka underground to learn from the senior Chevalier about matters such as the tutelary pact and how to carry out the essential task of resupplying ectoplasmic fluid.

Hatsune was surrounded by a reservoir of marine-blue artificial ectoplasmic fluid.

Several Greek columns stood towering from the water, contributing to a solemn atmosphere like a temple's. The water surface was criss-crossed by narrow paths.

Walking along the paths, the two of them reached the bath further inside the shrine.

Leading the way, Rikka shared her "Chevalier insights" with Hatsune. Her explanations were not detailed and always concluded

with asking her to "feel with her body."

Inside the bath area was a round vat of ectoplasmic fluid similar to a swimming pool.

Rikka removed her military uniform on the side. Hatsune hastily unfastened her clothing and removed her pink kimono, hakama, and hair ribbon. At any rate, she already knew that Chevaliers had to soak themselves in ectoplasmic fluid to allow the source of mystic powers to seep into their body and soul."

"...Wow, that's pretty rough-and-ready indeed."

"Hmm? Did you just say something?"

"Nothing really, just talking to myself~"

Rikka tilted her head in puzzlement when Hatsune looked around and commented with a smile.

Hatsune had confirmed her earlier impressions again when she saw the lady Chevalier remove her military uniform and casually sent it to the floor with a swift toss. However, as one would expect of a dignified practitioner of the sword, Rikka carefully took down Onikiri Yasutsuna from her waist and lowered it to the floor.

Hatsune folded her own clothing properly and gathered in one spot.

Hatsune used to be just as rough-and-ready, but during her time in the imperial palace as a trainee, she had been forced to learn cooking, cleaning, laundry and other "necessary accomplishments." Folding clothing immediately after undressing was one of the precepts learned.

(...Incidentally, her sloppiness and unruly nature as a trainee lady-in-waiting had given the head lady-in-waiting quite a headache, almost forcing her to design a special curriculum to train Hatsune.)

In any case, the two of them stepped into the vat of ectoplasmic fluid together.

"It's so cold!"

Hatsune shrieked the moment she touched the ice-cold ectoplasmic fluid.

Fighting back tears while she endured the chill, she immersed herself in the mysterious spiritual water until shoulder-level.

...After enduring the cold in the ectoplasmic fluid for a couple minutes, Hatsune started feeling her entire body heat up. A few minutes later, her body temperature had rebounded completely.

The temperature was like dipping in hot water. Hatsune finally understood.

This heat in her body was precisely the source of miraculous powers of the mystical—

This was also the power granted to Imperial Japan by Lord Tenryuu, Princess Shiori's grandfather.

In addition to the rise in body temperature, there was also a feeling of excitement. Hatsune looked at her removed clothing. The blue scroll placed on top was the proof of the Feat of Arms she had acquired.

In that instant, she experienced auditory hallucination. It was young Kurou's arrogant voice.

The voice seemed to be howling, demanding Hatsune to give him more power and to hurry up and take him to the battlefield to slaughter enemies...

"It's about time," Rikka said slowly, also immersed in the ectoplasmic fluid. "Tachibana, form the tutelary pact like how I taught you."

"Okay... Uh, upon my Appellation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune, I pray to the local shrine of Suruga. Pray grant me the blessing of holy water and the authorizing seal of warfare to become a war god to defend Suruga!"

After Hatsune finished speaking in one breath, her body began to glow faintly.

Then Hatsune noticed a great amount of mystic power flow into her through her feet—through the soles linked to Suruga's land—stunning her for a moment.

Rikka nodded at the surprised Hatsune and said, "With that, you are now a Chevalier tasked with the defense of Suruga. I look forward to working with you."

"Yes, same here too!"

Hatsune replied cheerfully and relaxed her shoulders.

Earlier, she had been nervous to some extent, but now there was confidence in her heart. She absentmindedly looked at Rikka opposite her.

...Hatsune was quite intrigued. Rikka's figure was perfect. Beautiful.

Akigase Rikka's complexion was pale with a slim overall build. However, her bust and hip areas were so voluptuous that you could almost add a "bam!" sound effect. Undoubtedly, she was very buxom.

Furthermore, her waist was very narrow and sexy.

Even Hatsune could not help but sigh in envy.

(...She's so attractive, just like her personality.)

Rikka was not excessively skinny like a model.

Her body was slender while blessed with voluptuousness capable of stealing men's hearts. This kind of figure was very attractive even from the perspective of the same sex.

Furthermore, despite her rough-and-ready habits, her personality did not come across as sloppy, amazingly enough.

The reason was her dignified comportment. Presumably, this was due to the discipline and etiquette cultivated through martial arts training, the beautiful way she moved her body, and her upright posture.

In addition, she was a beautiful maiden with waist-length black hair. Flawless in appearance.

"Tachibana, you and Masatsugu-dono are not real siblings, right?"

"We're not. I don't really know the details myself, but anyway, our formal relationship is 'relatives'♪"

This description was far too sloppy and not very formal, but Hatsune did not mind.

In any case, she optimistically believed that it was fine as long as she got her message across. However, Rikka looked inexplicably troubled with a frown on her face.

"...I see, so this is the method they used to conceal his true identity? Since Tachibana isn't his real sister, perhaps..."

Hatsune could not hear clearly what Rikka was murmuring.

Then Rikka stared intently at Hatsune's body and said, "By the way, your family must have raised you well."

"Fufu, I am a well-bred lady after all♪"

"No, that's not what I meant. I am saying that you are physically very mature."

Hatsune was secretly happy that her heritage as a descendant of *jikisan hatamoto* was visible despite the great number of uncouth characters in the Tachibana clan when Rikka rejected her interpretation and even examined her body closely.

Indeed, Tachibana Hatsune definitely had a mature body.

Rikka was voluptuous but Hatsune's level surpassed hers.

Before entering middle school, Hatsune was already showing signs of ample maturation. This continued along, resulting in her use of G-cups at the young age of sixteen.

Rikka was probably an E. An overwhelming victory for Hatsune.

Hatsune was aware of her own figure, but there were worrying elements.

"Oh, umm, I do train diligently, but because meals and midnight snacks are so tasty, I often eat too much unintentionally. P-Please don't look too closely..."

"No need to be shy, you don't look fat at all."

While praising Hatsune, Rikka's expression was very solemn.

"My brothers back home secretly keep photobooks. Many of the photos show slender yet voluptuous women in swimsuits... Tachibana, your figure doesn't lose to them at all. In fact, you might be superior."

"R-Really?"

"Assuredly so. I search my brothers' rooms occasionally and tell them that they should openly display those photos as manly men."

Hatsune could not help but smile, but then a thought occurred to her.

So the aristocracy in Tōkaidō's ruling house also looked at that kind of stuff. Perhaps back home, Rikka-sama was the kind of sister who terrorized her younger brothers like a demon or a tyrant?

However, a maidenly expression surfaced on the face of this possibly demon-like daughter of a noble house.

"As fellow Chevaliers, I would like to confirm something with you..."

Stammering, Rikka mustered her courage to ask, "Does Hiji—Masatsugu-dono have those kinds of photobooks? Basically, does he enjoy looking at women with well-developed figures... Like yours?"

Hatsune was taken by surprise. It sounded like Rikka had said something inaudible during her slight pause, possibly "well-developed figures *surpassing mine*... Like yours?"

In any case, Hatsune answered with uncertainty.

"That's hard to say. I've never seen any in his room. Oh right, I don't think there was anything like that in his parents' house either."

"I-I see."

"But on further thought, Onii-sama is in charge of the beauty contest for the school festival committee."

"Beauty contest!? That is so scandalous..."

"A school festival is scheduled for December, but now it's unclear whether it'll go ahead. Onii-sama sometimes mentions that he'll try his best to organize a spectacular beauty contest."

"I see... May I ask another question?"

Rikka remained worried and she asked in an especially maidenly tone of voice, "This is purely something that I must confirm as a Chevalier. Masatsugu-dono is in the personal service of Her Highness—Princess Shiori, isn't he? Would it be possible that he might... feel attracted to the beautiful princess?"

"Uh, well, Onii-sama doesn't really talk that much..."

Does Rikka-sama actually feel...? Wondering that, Hatsune said, "So I don't really know. Of course, since Onii-sama is such a weirdo, he probably doesn't have such tasteful motivations..."

Hatsune answered ambivalently. Rikka looked a bit disappointed.

Seeing her senior a little depressed, Hatsune's doubts grew stronger. *Perhaps the way she feels about Onii-sama is—*

"Rikka-sama and Onii-sama... That's impossible, right?"

"Hatsune, what are you talking about?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. Forget it♪"

This was a certain room on the top floor of a three-story building somewhere in the Suruga tutelary fort.

It was the office of the castellan, Akigase Rikka. Masatsugu was resting on the sofa for receiving guests while Hatsune, sitting next to him, was staring at his face, mumbling to herself.

Hatsune's tone sounded suspicious but what she said did not seem important.

Masatsugu decided to ignore it. The current task of the moment was to hand over congratulatory gifts to the new Chevalier who had just finished replenishing ectoplasmic fluid.

"This just arrived from the commissariat to congratulate your Chevalier Conferment."

"Eh, really!? I'm so happy. There's juice, cola, and so many snacks! Recently, it's been impossible to buy these things!"

Masatsugu pointed at the things on the reception table, causing Hatsune's eyes to glimmer.

There were cans of cold drinks and PET bottles, as well as snacks and tons of sweets such as chocolate. Maybe a child might, but one would not expect a sixteen-year-old girl to get excited over such gifts.

Sitting opposite to Masatsugu and Hatsune, Shiori smiled and said, "Food logistics in the outskirts of Suruga are now under the tutelary fort's management. This task was completed in the beginning of the week. How wonderfully efficient."

Shiori praised the castellan Rikka, who was sitting at the work desk in the back of the room.

The lady Chevalier smiled and shrugged.

"Please direct this praise to the ones in charge of the commissariat and the municipal government. I simply issued orders and left the details of execution to their discretion."

Suruga's surroundings were blockaded by the Restoration Alliance, preventing freedom of movement.

In other words, all logistics were interrupted. Lacking goods and support from outside, Suruga would run out of food eventually. Consequently, food had to be purchased from food companies, transportation businesses, and shops in advance then passed onto a government agency to manage.

These purchased goods, combined with army provisions in stock, became the "rations" provided to civilians.

Tutulary forts were not merely military bases—

They also stockpiled food in case of natural disasters or emergencies like now. Furthermore, the underground fluid power generation systems using artificial ectoplasmic fluid normally provided vast amounts of electricity for the surrounding area. When necessary, a certain level of regional life could be supported, centered around a tutulary fort.

"Rikka-sama, how long will supplies last under rationing?"

"Two months... according to the commissariat's estimates. But as we all know, predictions on the battlefield frequently land way off mark. Unexpected events frequently happen. Apart from that..."

Rikka answered Shiori's question with worry.

"The residents of the city are currently quite understanding... But the stress will build up and explode in some manner eventually. When that happens, voices inside Suruga will start advocating cooperation with the Restoration Alliance. How long we can maintain this 'cage'... It is quite hard to say for certain."

The budget for purchasing food was jointly funded by the tutulary fort and the municipal government.

During times of war, large quantities of military scrip would be put into circulation. Military scrip referred to substitute currency used by militaries and could be redeemed for cash value from the government.

This also meant that Suruga had to resolve its crisis while the Japanese government was intact.

For civilians, the use of military scrip lacked assurance. As time dragged on, it would also become one of the factors contributing to civilian unrest.

"Umm..." Hatsune raised her hand to interrupt the conversation between the Governor General's daughter and the imperial princess.

"The Restoration Alliance hasn't attacked lately... Are they waiting for us to run out of supplies?"

"Probably. A castle whose defenses cannot be breached immediately can always be taken through strategy." Rikka clicked her tongue and said, "According to my father's messages, our negotiations with Tōsandō are not going smoothly. Besides, as things drag on, the Restoration Alliance will become more entrenched. As a result, my father has informed me that he intends to launch a counterattack from Yamanashi before the situation turns dire. We would like to coordinate with this operation from Suruga, but..."

Tōkaidō was a narrow region elongated east-west.

It was composed of the three prefectures of Aichi, Shizuoka, and Yamanashi. Of the entire Shizuoka region, Suruga was the only place yet to fall, while Yamanashi had not been touched by the Restoration Alliance yet.

However, Rikka said in frustration, "Morgan le Fay has deployed barriers around Hakone Checkpoint and the neighboring Fuji tutelary fort. It is difficult for small retainer beasts to approach for reconnaissance. The situation does not look good."

"What is Morgan le Fay?" asked Masatsugu, not recognizing the term.

Rikka smiled wryly and said, "An ifrit from Britain's Far East Fleet, and one of their finest specimens too. Neither the noetic officers currently at Suruga nor Sakuya are able to break a barrier deployed by a divinity of that class."

"Oh?"

The Suruga tutelary fort had the ifrit Seiryuu and its avatar, the spirit Sakuya.

However, the British apparently had a guardian deity surpassing them. Masatsugu was deeply impressed.

Shiori, knowledgeable in noetic techniques, fell into deep thought.

"I have a suggestion."

Then the princess proceeded to explain patiently.

Chapter 3 - Coeur de Lion

Part 1

The Suruga tutelary fort was located on a mountainous region formed from two adjacent mountains in a north-south series.

Suruga City lay to the west of these mountains while Shimizu City lay to the east. Currently, Tachibana Masatsugu and two companions were traveling in a plain-looking domestic vehicle, driving from Suruga towards Shimizu.

"So quiet..." Masatsugu muttered from the front passenger seat. He was looking out the window at the streets of Suruga.

It was 9am. Putting aside the obvious early hour, there was a lack of vibrancy. Population was sparse to begin with in this regional city, but there were no pedestrians in the outdoors. Cars were few too.

It was as though all the residents had gone on vacation—

"It's only natural, Onii-sama. Unlike our high school, many schools and businesses are on holiday. After all, you get hungry easily if you run around for no good reason," responded Hatsune from the driver's seat, dressed in her usual *Haikara-san* getup.

Traffic on the road was very light and Hatsune was driving quite fast. Also, she had formed her tutelary pact at the water shrine yesterday.

"The rations distributed to civilians aren't particularly generous. The tutelary fort has also requisitioned gasoline in the city. There aren't many cars moving about outdoors."

"In other words... The populace is hiding at home, holding back their anxiety and dissatisfaction, is that right?"

The beauty in the back seat concluded in her lovely voice.

This beautiful maiden was dressed neatly in a white blouse and navy-blue skirt with her platinum blonde hair tied in a ponytail

with a red ribbon. She was Fujinomiya Shiori, a princess of Imperial Japan.

Today, her striking and pretty face was adorned by a pair of glasses.

Its purpose was for camouflage. It also enhanced her vibes of "wit and intellect" compared to usual.

Furthermore, she was using an Image Disguise noetic technique, preventing those unfamiliar with her from recognizing her as the princess.

Incidentally, Masatsugu was wearing a white long-sleeved t-shirt with black pants.

With a black jacket on top, his attire was similar in color to the school uniform.

"Are you really sure, Princess? Someone as important as you has no need to risk yourself by *leaving* Suruga to carry out this kind of mission..."

"It is fine, because I am the only one capable of doing it," Shiori replied to Hatsune quite decisively.

"Although Suruga has the genie named Sakuya, it would be no easy task to take that insecure child outside the city. Besides, she still needs to manage the tutelary fort."

"Princess, you mentioned that she has human shyness, right?"

"And frankly speaking, I would like to leave town for a change of pace too."

"Princess, your Machiavellian tendency to ruin inspiring stories on purpose is totally awesome."

"I must thank Rikka-sama for agreeing to my suggestion too."

Masatsugu felt the same way.

If anything were to happen to the princess, responsibility would fall

squarely upon Rikka as the castellan of Suruga. In spite of that, she had accepted Shiori's suggestion without the slightest hesitation.

"To think that Your Highness would be adept in noetic techniques, now that is truly living up to the name of Lord Tenryuu's bloodline. There is currently no noetic master in Suruga more accomplished than you, Your Highness. Please lend us your aid."

After Shiori revealed her own "ability," Rikka immediately gave the above response.

House Akigase's Chevalier princess prioritized expediency over playing it safe.

"Hatsune, our job is to protect the princess. If necessary, it won't be just swords. We may have to summon troops—Legions. Be prepared."

"Of course, Onii-sama!"

The novice Chevalier girl cheerfully answered Masatsugu's reminder.

Hatsune's current position was the princess' personal lady-in-waiting as well as a knight under her direct command.

...In fact, Hatsune had only inherited the Appellation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune just yesterday. When she attempted a summoning, only one Legion showed up.

Her power had not fully awakened—She was in a proto-Chevalier state.

She should be able to summon dozens of Legions once she grew accustomed to it. At present, her Chevalier Strength was tentatively "just 1."

Hatsune drove the car along a national highway, speeding through Shimizu City.

Like Suruga City, this region was also isolated like "an island on land."

There was a marked lack of vibrancy. Pedestrian and vehicle traffic was low. Continuing along the national highway, they were going to hit the Restoration Alliance's roadblock eventually.

"By the way, Hatsune, you encountered a boy during the ritual. He was Yoshitsune himself, visiting you in a dream to test your succession to Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune, right?"

"I think so."

Masatsugu was immediately certain of this. Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune was the Appellation taken straight from a general's name. Prior to his amnesia, Masatsugu had returned to the human realm as a Resurrectee, but due to certain reasons, Yoshitsune had not—

Masatsugu instinctively knew this was the truth.

On the other hand, Shiori said, "Perhaps Lord Yoshitsune turned out to be an unexpectedly helpful person."

"Why do you say that? He was so violent to me~"

"Think about it, we know many anecdotes about ancient warriors, including legends whose veracity is hard to confirm... There is a story about Lord Yoshitsune, which involves Ushiwakamaru defeating Benkei at the Gojō Bridge in Kyoto. It is most likely fictional."

"Then he chose to test me at the bridge because—"

"Perhaps it was a joke on his part, since he knew that such a legend was circulating in the later world."

This was not a remote possibility. Masatsugu nodded in agreement.

Even if Yoshitsune was a genius in martial arts, how could he have won an overwhelming victory as a child against the equally rare hero, Musashibō Benkei? In this time and age when dead people could be reborn, anything could happen.

However, the legend of martial valor at Gojō Bridge definitely

sounded contrived.

"Of course, it is also possible for truth to be stranger than fiction."

Shiori shrugged and ended this conversation.

The plain domestic car continued to race along smoothly with the three passengers.

Just as they crossed the Okitsu River and were about to leave Shimizu City's urban area, Hatsune stopped the car. The elevation here was relatively high.

...The car had been driving along a national highway that followed the coast of Suruga Bay.

Literally a seaside road, it almost followed the same route as the old highway of Tōkaidō in the Edo period. Steep mountain roads lay ahead while Satsuta Ridge was close by. Proceeding through the post stations of Yuijuku and Kanbarajuku, one would then reach the Fuji River.

On the other side of Fuji River was Fuji City, which was also the town where the Fuji tutelary fort was located.

The ukiyo-e artist Utagawa Hiroshige had also depicted part of this scenery in *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*.

This road through mountainous terrain was actually less than twenty kilometers long and quite a quick drive. However, Hatsune parked the car on the shoulder and the trio disembarked.

"We will choose the nearer side of Fuji City as our destination for now... Fuji River."

Shiori used noesis to project several visual images in the air.

They all showed wide roads in the mountains. Every location was buried under landslide debris, evidently impassable.

Shiori had sent retainer beasts for reconnaissance and used noetic control to playback what they saw.

"The situation is the same for all roads leading out of Suruga City—all outbound roads blockaded by the Restoration Alliance. At Satsuta Ridge, a little up ahead along our current road, there have been landslides. Rather than natural disasters, they were all caused by Crusades."

Next, Shiori pointed at an image of a highway toll booth.

The toll booth had an inspection checkpoint with many Caucasian British soldiers inside.

"They must have left the highways intact so that they could use them to transport supplies in the future. However, given that there are a number of strict security checkpoints and the fact that they have established naval superiority in Suruga Bay, if one wanted to enter the mountains..."

Shiori smiled sardonically.

"As soon as the Restoration Alliance's retainer beasts pick up the scent of humans, they will attack like ravenous bears."

"Princess, question here. What are the chances of getting attacked?"

"From what I have heard, the probability of encountering a retainer beast in these kinds of situations is roughly the same as monster encounters in games. In every zone, the number of retainer beasts are triple figures minimum."

"...Indeed." Masatsugu looked up in Fuji City's direction. "Three white British wyverns are flying over there."

"Eh, you can see that, Onii-sama? I can't see anything at all."

Hatsune squinted, staring intently in the same direction.

After twenty seconds, she finally gave up and said in surprise, "Come on, I tested 2.0 in visual acuity... Onii-sama, your eyesight is crazy good."

"Really? I thought this was pretty normal."

From Masatsugu's view, there were three white dots flying northeast. On closer examination, the white dots had outlines shaped like wyverns.

Ignoring their conversation, Shiori said confidently, "However, the situation would be completely different for those who are highly adept in noetic control like myself. I will come up with a solution. Hatsune, could you please prepare?"

"Roger that~"

Hatsune did as directed, taking out three slim A3-size boards and putting them on the ground.

The three boards were retainer beast talismans. Shiori touched the talismans as she did before. The retainer beast talismans activated and transformed into "wolves." They were covered in beautiful silver fur and had huge bodies as large as a horse.

Three mid-size retainer beasts—Mibu wolves—had appeared.

According to legend, Hijikata Toshizō had led a pack of these Mibu wolves, fighting across various battlefields in eastern Japan.

"Among all retainer beasts, Mibu wolves have an especially keen sense of smell. They will immediately detect any retainer beasts that approach. If we are unfortunate enough to encounter enemy retainer beasts... I will drive them away using noesis."

The three of them each rode a Mibu wolf.

The wolves began to run. They needed to head east towards the Fuji River by traversing the mountain where there were no roads. Dashing as fast as the wind, the Mibu wolves raced across slopes and mixed forest as though running on flat ground.

Occasionally, they would take a detour, probably due to detecting the scent of British retainer beasts.

Even so, it took the trio roughly two hours to reach their destination. After descending the mountain forest, there was the vast greenery of a tea plantation.

In front of them was also the clear water of the Fuji River.

The Fuji River was not massive in flow. There was plenty of gravel deposited on the shore or sandbanks.

Over in the northeastern sky was an expansive view of a sacred peak, offering the majestic scenery of Mount Fuji's snowy peak.

It looked even bigger and more impressive than the view from Suruga City.

The trio dismounted from the Mibu wolves, walking on their own feet once again.

"...Princess, isn't this inside the Restoration Alliance's sphere of influence already?"

"Indeed. However, they will not demand us to present identification unless we do anything too suspicious. Please behave as calmly as possible."

"Hmm?"

Masatsugu felt intrigued. He sensed powerful noesis coming from the far shore of the Fuji River.

He swept his gaze over the streets of Fuji City, a regional city similar to Suruga. The Fuji tutelary fort, which had been conquered by the British, was more than ten kilometers away in this direction.

"Hatsune, do you know where this weird presence is coming from?"

"Huh? Hmmm... Woah, it's amazing!"

The novice Chevalier looked at the eastern sky and instantly jumped in surprise.

Ordinary people were not very sensitive to noetic waves. After inheriting Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune successfully, Hatsune's senses were gradually augmented. This time, she and Masatsugu both detected the same thing.

Currently, powerful noesis was swirling in the sky over the Fuji tutelary fort.

In the center of that vortex was a gigantic eyeball!

"Is that Morgan le Fay?"

"I would think so. The principal image has been transported to Hakone Checkpoint... What remains at the Fuji tutelary fort is probably her shadow," explained Shiori to Masatsugu.

The Mibu wolves they had been using for locomotion growled fiercely.

They were glaring across the Fuji River, preparing for combat. Their hostility was directed at the barrier that Morgan le Fay had deployed for repelling retainer beasts.

Mid-size or larger retainer beasts were not very affected by the barrier, but it looked like they did not feel comfortable either.

Shiori waved her hand and the three Mibu wolves ran into the mountain.

"Let us *prepare* immediately"

The trio walked across the tea plantation and roads on foot, heading to the Fuji River's shore.

Soon they arrived at the water's edge. Masatsugu and Hatsune worked efficiently. Using foldable shovels, they dug ten shallow holes.

Digging through the gravel on the riverbank was hard labor, but fortunately, both of them were very confident in their physical strength. The task was over quickly.

Shiori placed a retainer beast talisman into each hole. These thin rectangles were the size of cards used for writing Japanese poems. Once the talismans were placed, the two knights swiftly buried the holes.

"I beseech you to appear. May the gods be with you."

Shiori touched the buried holes and recited an incantation to complete the preparations.

"This will summon retainer beasts that won't lose to the barrier, Princess?"

"I cannot assert with certainty. The success rate is roughly 60%."

Hatsune's gaze read "eh, it's not 100%" and Shiori coughed lightly.

"It cannot be helped. This is a contest of technique to see whether the strength of my noesis can trump Morgan le Fay's influence."

"Okay."

"If the noesis I poured into a talisman is stronger, it will produce a retainer beast that will not lose to the barrier. However, since this is ultimately a barrier deployed by the best spirit of the British forces, it is hard to be optimistic here."

"So that's how it works."

"Naturally, my noetic control is first rate. If I fail here, it means that it cannot be accomplished without a team of expert masters from the Noetic Bureau."

"Taking opportunities to show off your confidence every now and then, Princess, you're so awesome!"

While listening to the conversation between the two girls, Masatsugu realized something.

In front of them was a wide and beautiful view centered on Japan's number one sacred peak, Mount Fuji, and an army of Kamuys were flying across this view.

A couple hundred Kamuys were advancing in a spherical formation.

An army of British Legions also sortied to intercept the Kamuys.

Outnumbered by two to one by the Kamuys, these Legions were similar in appearance to the Crusade but instead of the usual white coloring, they were vivid crimson all over.

Part 2

King Richard I, the Lionheart.

Yesterday, after speaking with Edward the Black Prince at Nijou Castle, he immediately left Kyoto.

Taking the same combination of land and air travel as his collateral descendant had used to get to Kyoto, he arrived at the Fuji tutelary fort in Shizuoka Prefecture within the same day.

And today, Richard received the long-awaited report.

Three hundred Kamuys of the Tōkaidō provincial army were approaching the Fuji tutelary fort.

"Hohohoho. Things are unfolding according to Édoua... Edward's plan."

Richard laughed proudly to himself.

"In that case, it would make for some brief entertainment if I were to add some blood-red color to his plan. Allow Richard the Lionheart, the forefather with whom he shares a common bloodline, to do so..."

Built at the center of the Fuji tutelary fort was a nation-protecting keep just like the Suruga tutelary fort.

Richard was on the roof, admiring the view of Mount Fuji that was twenty kilometers to the north. South of this mountain was Shizuoka Prefecture while to the north was Yamanashi Prefecture. Both areas were under Tōkaidō jurisdiction.

However, Shizuoka had fallen under the control of the British armed forces.

Trying to counterattack, the Tōkaidō provincial army had mobilized three hundred Kamuys to sortie from the southernmost part of Yamanashi—the Motosu tutelary fort at Fuji Five Lakes.

The enemy contingent was flying in a packed formation, invading Fuji City from the north.

Next to Richard, a girl dressed in a sailor outfit and beret said, "The Black Prince of the British Empire, is staying at Kyoto. Looks like... this news, has succeeded in reaching the Tōkaidō higher-ups."

"The boy is having a grand time in Kyoto."

Richard laughed happily.

"After attending the ceremony in the castle yesterday, he ran off into the streets. Today, he had to go to some kind of tea party and he grumbled coyly about how tough it was to attract attention in a natural manner."

"Morrigan thinks... he actually enjoys it."

The Lionheart was talking to a doll possessed by a genie.

This was "Unit 2." Morrigan's principal image and "Unit 1" doll had stayed in Hakone. For the time being, she was transmitting noetic waves from Hakone to possess Unit 2 over here.

Furthermore, the sky over the nation-protecting keep was occupied by a gigantic eyeball and powerful noesis.

This was also left behind at Fuji by Morrigan's principal image, Morgan le Fay, to work the effect of driving away retainer beasts.

"However, it is thanks to his ploy that the old foxes of Tōkaidō have taken the bait."

Edward had intentionally strolled through Kyoto, well aware that the enemy's intelligence network extended into Kyoto, so as to feed Tōkaidō the impression that the Hakone area was weakened in defense.

Using this method, he had lured the enemy army, which had been biding their time passively, to attack.

The Black Prince had laid an extermination trap for the enemy to

come on their own initiative. Since he had to go to Kyoto regardless, he took the opportunity to set up this ploy.

"How brave of the enemy to attack in glee while Edward is absent. Spirit Morrigan, analyze the enemy lineup."

"Affirmative."

Morrigan instantly executed the orders of Richard the Lionheart.

She commanded the noetic waves lingering in the air over the nation-protecting keep—i.e. the swirling noesis—to project noetic waves for enemy detection. Morgan le Fay's mystic power turned into waves, spreading throughout Fuji City.

These waves captured the Kamuy army flying in the sky over the outskirts of Fuji City.

"Enemy Kamuys... Total of 307. Chevaliers, six. Chevaliers of Yamanashi region in Tōkaidō, estimated total of ten to twelve. Almost half deployed in this operation."

"Excellent, then I shall send out half their numbers."

"One, half? Too few."

"I do not care. This is my first battle in Japan. It is imperative to let the people of Japan know that I am a brave hero who triumphs over numerical disadvantage. Assemble under my name of Richard the Lionheart—"

On the roof of the nation-protecting keep, the English king of old flapped his crimson cape.

"Granted the name of the royal sword Escalibor, my Legions!"

Numerous Legions appeared overhead of Richard and Morrigan.

They looked similar to Crusades but not exactly. The noesis of Richard's overwhelming Chevalier Strength, a prided trait, gave rise to a great army of British Legions in red.

"Now then, my knights. Soar the sky with me!"

The lion's battle began.

The enemy leader, Prince Edward, was absent from Hakone.

Tōkaidō higher-ups issued the order to use this opportunity to retake the Fuji tutelary fort. If possible, they would ride on their success to capture Hakone.

Having received these orders, six Chevaliers of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom sortied from the Motosu region in Fuji Five Lakes to enter Fuji City's airspace—This was basically the current situation.

"What!?"

The leader of the Tōkaidō force, Chevalier Ogura, was doubting his eyes. The outskirts of Fuji City consisted mostly of vast natural parks or golf courses. The 307 Kamuys were currently flying over this zone.

The six Chevaliers were also riding blue wyverns to accompany them.

The daily replenishment of ectoplasmic fluid also strengthened the bodies of Chevaliers. The cold wind blowing at an altitude of several hundred meters only felt slightly chilly to them. They were being approached by a British army.

The 150 Crusades were colored a fiery crimson.

The Japanese Chevaliers were not only surprised by the color but also the location of the encounter.

Legions only needed one day to revive when they were killed in action near the tutelary fort serving as their stronghold—

Because of that, the defending side would try as much as possible to engage the enemy near their stronghold. This was common sense in warfare. Unbelievably, this army had ventured far away from the Fuji tutelary fort to fight in the suburbs!

"What on earth is the enemy commander thinking...?"

Seeing the opponent give up home advantage on his own, Chevalier Ogura was stunned.

Was there some kind of devious ploy? Or a brainless fool who simply wanted to attract attention? There was still a kilometer between the two armies.

Soon after.

Roughly a hundred of the crimson Crusades began to accelerate fiercely, charging at the Tōkaidō army with frightening speed!

The 307 Kamuys were flying in a spherical formation, ready for combat.

Meanwhile, the red Crusade army had only sent a hundred to charge. They had formed a V-shaped wedge formation to attack an enemy three times their number.

"A fool after all!"

Chevalier Ogura cursed from his wyvern's saddle. This enemy was either a fool, or someone with excessive bravery, or a dreamer seeking romanticism in battle, or a problematic character overly confident in his talents as a general.

...However, Chevalier Ogura was not aware of the horrifying truth.

The enemy general was a monster for whom all the above applied, including the "fool" label.

"A knightly charge is the essence of war..."

The hundred Escalibors in the vanguard advanced as a "red wedge."

Riding his white wyvern, Richard watched his troops charge at the enemy while he stayed with his other fifty Legions that were hovering in the air on standby.

In front of the charging vanguard, 307 Tōkaidō Kamuys waited.

Imperial Japan's Legions were clad in blue armor and uniforms. Their figures were slim and trim, a size smaller than the imposing British Legions.

The Kamuys were too skinny, according to Richard's sensibilities...

These Kamuys entered a packed spherical formation and kept firing their bayonet rifles. The rain of flashing light attacked the Escalibors' wedge formation.

307 versus 100. Victory seemed impossible. However, the Lionheart continued to smile.

"Hohohoho. You are too careless, knights of the orient."

The moment he had ordered the hundred Escalibors to charge, Richard I was already certain of his victory. As soon as he sensed complacency in the enemy ranks, he knew he could take advantage of the Tōkaidō generals' mindset.

It was true that they had entered formation and were traveling to the battlefield, but they were still quite far from the Fuji tutelary fort.

Richard's beast-like nose had smelled the samurai's carelessness in their preconceived notion that enemies would not attack at such a distance.

"Those who cannot distinguish between confidence and carelessness are unfit to be the Lionheart's opponents..."

The Escalibors charged at the Kamuys that were waiting for them.

The two armies activated protective barriers. The glow of each barrier was proportional to the army headcount. In a shootout with rifles, Tōkaidō held an overwhelming advantage.

"Hoho, you may celebrate your advantage now, while you still can."

The particles of light around the Kamuys blocked virtually all of the British shots.

In contrast, the rain of flashing light pierced the protective barrier of the hundred Escalibors, striking their red bodies repeatedly, skewering their shoulders, abdomens, and heads.

This barrage was definitely sufficient to wipe out the charging British army.

In spite of that, the Escalibors soldiered onwards. Even with massive holes in their abdomens, amputated limbs, broken heads and helmets—

Like the living dead, the British army advanced nonstop.

Not only that, but the hundred Legions accelerated all at once as a single unit.

In merely ten-odd seconds, their charge surpassed 500 kilometers per hour. The high-speed Escalibors headed straight for the spherical formation of the 307 Kamuys.

It looked like driving a crimson wedge sharply into a gigantic blue sphere—

"O Escalibors, I shall secure victory by stepping over your glorious corpses. Battle relentlessly."

Watching his troops fight bravely, Richard's voice was warm and ecstatic.

Meanwhile, the hundred Escalibors continued to charge despite their grievous wounds. They crashed violently into the Kamuys' formation!

With rifles raised, they stabbed their bayonets into the flesh of the blue Legions.

Paired with blades, the charging attack inflicted damage on par with a one-hit kill. Over 90% of the Kamuys caught in the impact died on the spot, crashing into the ground.

Currently, the crimson wedge had succeeded in puncturing the blue sphere and was about to pierce through and out the other side.

"Hmm, only such battle spirit would be worthy as the Lionheart's Feat of Arms!"

Seeing the charge succeed, Richard was satisfied from the bottom of his heart.

Furthermore, the vanguard's offensive did not end there. Remaining neatly in a "wedge," the Escalibors turned around and rammed the Kamuys' spherical formation again.

...The same scene was reenacted.

The defending side attempted to use rapid fire to halt the enemy's charge. The attacking side soldiered on, charging at full strength.

The Japanese Legions became victims of the charge. The Tōkaidō side suffered serious casualties with blue corpses crashing into the ground one after another.

The Escalibors' second charge had succeeded. Richard nodded and said, "I see that you have made good use of Coeur de Lion granted by me!"

"Coeur de Lion" was French, meaning "Heart of the Lion" in English.

A so-called lion's heart referred to a soul of courage, fighting spirit, and indomitable perseverance. The Feat of Arms—Coeur de Lion was precisely the ability of Richard I to bestow such heroic fortitude upon his Legions.

...Invoking this Feat of Arms caused the Legions under his command to become warriors undaunted by even death itself—

Even if they died, they still charged to the bitter end.

In fact, after this attack concluded, the hundred Escalibors in the vanguard finally succumbed. The fire of life extinguished, they crashed down one after another from the air.

Pierced multiple times by the Kamuys' gunshots earlier, they were already dead to begin with.

After the fierce assault from the British army's two suicidal charges, the Tōkaidō side was down to less than a hundred Legions.

"A triumphant opening. Victory is at hand."

Richard still had fifty Legions remaining by his side.

Although he was confident he could win with these numbers, something else took greater priority.

"Gather, my royal swords. It is imperative to demonstrate a king's majesty once more."

After saying that, Richard looked southeast.

He smiled. Of the red giant winged soldiers he had summoned at the tutelary fort earlier—the remainder were approaching slowly. He had called them slightly earlier using noetic waves.

These Escalibors numbered 867.

This was undoubtedly a massive army, and he had just led 150 troops to the battlefield... Indeed, Richard I's Chevalier Strength had reached 1017!

"Next, I shall crush the enemy here with the might of a massive army. My knights, follow me!"

Richard declared majestically.

Then riding his wyvern, he personally charged at the remaining Kamuys.

The accompanying nine hundred or so Escalibors organized themselves into a spherical formation around the Lionheart, beginning to charge like a flying bullet!

"Inform the tutelary fort to send out wyvern squadrons. All Japanese Chevaliers found on the battlefield must be captured alive. I shall end this battle here!"

A sprite retainer beast left to relay his orders.

Meanwhile, the Tōkaidō remnants began to retreat and flee from the Lionheart's great army.

They ran north as fast as they could, towards Mount Fuji. It was quite commendable that even at this juncture, the Kamuys still remained in a packed sphere without breaking out of formation.

The lion did not think that it was acceptable to let the enemy go just because they numbered less than a hundred.

"Pursue them! Bite their tails!"

Richard fully unleashed a carnivorous predator's nature and hunger to hunt down the fleeing prey.

Part 3

"Inconceivable..."

An aerial battle between Legions was taking place over the outskirts of Fuji City.

Having witnessed the one-sided battle, Shiori was shocked. The 307 Kamuys of Tōkaidō were losing rapidly.

The surviving Kamuys and Chevaliers retreated north, towards Mount Fuji.

Over eight hundred red Legions chased them, flying off in an orderly manner.

Watching this scene, Hatsune lamented, "In the first attack, the enemy simply charged in a straight line, right? Is a direct charge that effective? Oh, it was thanks to the power of the Feat of Arms killer move, right!?"

"That's one of the reasons, but not all of it," Masatsugu realized he was almost smiling when he replied.

Laughing at an ally's defeat was not very respectable. His almost smile was unintentional. The reason for this was the fact that the enemy was overwhelmingly strong and had won through brute force by such ridiculous tactics.

The enemy must have seen through the Tōkaidō side's confidence... Or rather, carelessness.

This carelessness was what made the Japanese decide to rely on numbers to counter the charging attack. The enemy was well aware that he held the advantage in a contest of strength, which is why he had launched that reckless charge.

"That Chevalier has a very keen *nose*."

"Nose? You mean he's got a good sense of smell?"

"Yes. By the way, Princess, do you know the name of the enemy commander?" Masatsugu first nodded at the curious Hatsune before turning to ask Shiori.

That Chevalier Strength and presence made it extremely likely he was a Resurrectee. The knowledgeable Shiori instantly gave an answer.

"A man who calls himself the Lionheart would most likely be King Richard I of medieval England. I recall that he is Prince Edward's collateral relative... five generations his senior."

Masatsugu committed the unfamiliar name to memory.

Also, the trio was currently at the shore of the Fuji River. The suburban battlefield was a couple kilometers away from them. Normally speaking, there was no way to watch the battle in detail.

However, a type of gadget allowed them to do so.

"Princess, the retainer beasts came out okay, thank goodness!"

"I did mention that the success rate exceeded 50%."

Hatsune congratulated the princess and Shiori replied proudly.

Of the ten retainer beast talismans they had prepared earlier, a little while ago, five of them transformed into Yatagarasus, materializing under buried earth.

The Yatagarasu was similar to an ordinary crow in size and appearance.

Their common appearance allowed them to infiltrate any place to carry out reconnaissance, a prized ability.

After the fighting began, Shiori hurried to send these five to the battlefield. When the Yatagarasus returned, she used noetic control to project videos of what they had seen.

The Yatagarasus were currently standing ready on the riverbank gravel.

"...Oh my? Something seems to have happened after the battle ended."

Three rectangular windows were opened in front of the princess.

The five Yatagarasus provided visual memories from different angles. Shiori was focused on one of them.

The video showed four British white wyverns flying in the air.

A Japanese blue wyvern was encircled by them, flying feebly with a soldier mounted, presumably captured and being taken away by the enemy.

Hatsune asked in puzzlement, "So that's really... a Tōkaidō Chevalier, right?"

"Yeah, captured as a hostage."

"Eh, a hostage!?"

The novice Chevalier was astonished and Masatsugu explained calmly, "Hostages have many uses... For example, the British could torture or slaughter hostages in front of the Suruga tutelary fort that they've failed to conquer so far. When our side rushes out in righteous fury, fighting to reclaim the hostages, they can just sit back and wait for us to come to them. This is one method to destroy a turtling enemy."

"Onii-sama, that's so evil!"

"According to the Charter of Chivalry in the modern world, tactics of this sort are forbidden. At least superficially. However, what Masatsugu-sama said is correct. Chevalier hostages are very effective bargaining chips in negotiations. Information can even be extracted from them... Also, they caught more than one Chevalier."

Shiori sighed and pointed at the video.

Two more Japanese Chevaliers were mounted on wyverns and being taken away.

"Capturing knights for hostages, Richard I is truly a medieval hero. Back in that age, catching knights of high nobility on the battlefield was a very distinguished feat."

"The other Chevaliers might have died or escaped..."

"Or captured somewhere else. In any case, the situation is quite bad," Shiori nodded in agreement with Masatsugu and said, "They not only lost a battle they initiated but also allowed valuable manpower to fall into the enemy's hands... If only we could rescue them."

The princess frowned as soon as she pondered the difficulty of a rescue mission.

The normally cheerful Hatsune also looked depressed.

After some contemplation of the current situation, Masatsugu slowly expressed his view.

"So, Princess, we need to act immediately."

"Eh? Act...? What are you talking about, Masatsugu-sama?"

"I mean rescuing those Chevaliers. We need to act now if we're going to do it."

Shiori was startled by the sudden suggestion. So was Hatsune.

"This type of mission gets harder as time goes by. Since we were lucky enough to be at the scene, we should make good use of this opportunity. Besides, the troublesome Lion King is away, off chasing remnants."

Masatsugu spoke in an indifferent tone lacking in fervor.

"So now is the moment. It's best to attack the tutelary fort before he returns."

"Attack!? You are going to attack the Fuji tutelary fort!?"

"Hold on! Just the two of us, Onii-sama and me!?"

Hatsune interjected in shock.

Masatsugu nodded, "Exactly."

"That's absolutely crazy. Even without that Richard guy, there will be other Chevaliers. Besides, this isn't Suruga, Onii-sama, so you won't be able to summon too many Legions, right?"

"Yeah, right now, I can use no more than twenty-four or five Kanesadas, I guess."

There was a drastic decrease in the number of Legions one could use outside their stronghold zone.

Chevalier Strength was discounted by roughly 90%. For Masatsugu, a Chevalier whose stronghold was Suruga City, the Fuji suburbs were definitely out of range.

"That's nowhere enough and all I have is one!"

"Not necessarily. This time around, we're not trying to capture a castle, so there's always a way. However, the big assumption here is that I will be relying on you to play a key role."

Masatsugu gazed at Hatsune.

"Huh?" said the puzzled girl who had just become a Chevalier yesterday.

Leaving the riverside, the trio entered Fuji City.

Their target, the Fuji tutelary fort was located in the suburbs, namely, the remote wetlands east of the city. Like the one in Suruga, the Fuji tutelary fort was built on military land far from urban areas.

Instead of going there directly, the trio first went to Tagonoura, the port facing Suruga Bay.

"Hatsune, prior to the operation, I need to make some final confirmations with Masatsugu-sama," Shiori suddenly said.

Shiori had spoken as soon as they entered a large park at the pier. The park featured large lawns, a botanical garden, and all kinds of athletic facilities.

"Could you wait here for a moment?"

"Yes, certainly."

Hatsune felt intrigued by this unexpected order but accepted it readily.

She sat down on a nearby bench to enjoy the green tea and bean jam bun she had just bought. "You can't fight battles on an empty stomach!" was what she had said earlier.

She had adjusted quickly, no longer surprised by the plan to attack the tutelary fort.

This open-mindedness and simplicity of hers could be considered Hatsune's strengths.

"The situation seems pretty stable in Fuji City."

"Yes, and we succeeded in reaching this port too."

Masatsugu and the disguised princess walked into the depths of the park together.

"A battle just happened yet people are already going out in the streets."

It was just past 2pm. Random couples and families could be seen outdoors.

It was Sunday today, at least, according to the calendar.

The two of them went to a small hill overlooking Suruga Bay. There happened to be a bench here and they took a seat.

"Well, it is understandable. The battlefield was not only far from urban areas but also took place in the mountains. The city's residents would only gather an impression that 'Legions are leaving

the tutelary fort to attack somewhere'," said Shiori with a shrug.

However, stability did not equate to peace. Buses were restricted to within Fuji City while trains were stopped just like in Suruga.

"This stability is owed to the Charter of Chivalry, I suppose."

"You mean the rules forbidding war cruelty or harming civilians?"

"Yes. Superficially, the Charter is 'a set of rules for international engagement that protects civilians'... In truth, it also 'demands civilians to obey certain rules'."

"How so?"

"After a battle, the residents of a conquered city are not allowed to oppose the occupation force, they are obliged to provide maximum cooperation, and must not leave the city without authorization... The Charter includes these rules which civilians must abide by in order to be eligible for protection."

"...I see."

"I presume that the mayor of Fuji City must have been forced to sign a written pledge on behalf of all residents to 'obey the Charter' right from the beginning."

They had witnessed many infantry units of the Restoration Alliance on their way here.

The infantry was patrolling the city on alert. However, to avoid provoking the sentiments of the residents, the soldiers in charge of patrolling were all Japanese—i.e. Kinai troops.

Also, the infantry showed no signs of brutalizing the residents.

However, soldiers dressed in khaki combat uniforms and equipped with automatic rifles, standing next to armored vehicles, still looked quite intimidating.

"We will run into trouble if we stay in Fuji City too long. Sooner or later, a certain situation would require us to show identification. If

the military discovers that we are from outside the city and have no traveling authorization, they will definitely arrest us on the spot, then all would be lost."

"You're right. Then I'd better get started."

"Y-Yes. May fortune be on your side..."

It was time to set off and Masatsugu got up from the bench. Now that Shiori had given her parting blessing, he was going to put the plan into motion—

For some reason, the princess reached out and grabbed the hem of Masatsugu's shirt.

"...Is there anything else?"

"Masatsugu-sama, please consider the significance of why I came to see you off alone!"

"Significance?"

"Y-Yes. There is no one around currently..."

Seeing the princess remonstrate him angrily while looking down shyly, Masatsugu understood. He sat back down on the bench.

"Sorry about that."

"N-No, then shall we... begin?"

There was originally a gap between them, roughly a meter. When Masatsugu sat on the bench again, this gap disappeared. He had taken his seat right next to Shiori.

Masatsugu gazed upon the liege he served, the beautiful princess.

Shiori gazed back at him, showing some worry in her expression.

"Princess."

Masatsugu called to her first, trying to relieve her tension.

They were so close together that Masatsugu could almost feel Shiori's body warmth. Shiori quietly reached out with her right hand and caressed Masatsugu's cheek.

"Masatsugu-sama, your body is still so cold..."

Shiori's voice was very quiet, only meant to be audible for the one in front of her.

"Like ice as always. Don't you feel cold yourself?"

"Not particularly. The heat from your precious blood, Princess, is plenty warm already."

"Then absorb as much as you can today. You will be heading out to battle next and need more ectoplasmic fluid..."

Tachibana Masatsugu was an amnesiac Resurrectee and unable to replenish ectoplasmic fluid on his own.

However, he had the ability to steal ectoplasmic fluid from others. This was Masatsugu's Feat of Arms—a special ability to bring about impossible miracles.

He embraced the princess audaciously, burying his face against her neck.

"Masatsugu-sama..."

Shiori held Masatsugu tightly, giving herself to him.

Through their clothing, Masatsugu could feel the warmth of Shiori's tender skin as well as the undulating curves of a womanly figure.

This type of intimate contact belonged to couples, but they did not stop here.

With his face against the princess' neck, Masatsugu kissed her pale skin, absorbing mystic power and the precursor of ectoplasmic fluid from the blood flowing inside her, inherited from the sacred beast Lord Tenryuu.

"Ah... Mmm—"

The absorbed life force melded into Masatsugu's body, becoming one with him.

Vaguely sensing this phenomenon, Shiori moaned in rapture, unable to suppress her voice at all.

"Mm... Uuuunn. Ahhhh—!"

Shiori's voice grew louder and her whole body heated up and flushed red. Even so, Masatsugu's lady liege still mustered the strength to speak, "M-Masatsugu-sama. Harder... is fine too, you know?"

"No, your body won't be able to take it, Princess."

Having obtained some power, Masatsugu stopped kissing Shiori's neck.

"There are still many things you must deal with later, Princess."

"I-I suppose you are right."

Shiori was slightly out of breath. She pouted slightly unhappily.

However, she shook her head and did not insist, only saying, "Indeed, you are correct. I still have to help Hatsune and must not deplete my energy here."

"I was hoping you could stay outside the city and simply wait for our return."

This operation had been prompted by an unexpected development.

Returning the princess to Suruga should have been the first priority, so Masatsugu wanted her to stay in a safe place.

However, Shiori said nonchalantly, "No, Masatsugu-sama, your plan undoubtedly requires Hatsune's assistance, but she has only just started to master a Chevalier's power. Without my help, the plan will not succeed."

"....."

"I have mentioned before that I am delighted by opportunities to make use of my abilities."

Shiori analyzed in detail her reasons for exposing herself to risk.

Naturally, her bodyguard Masatsugu did not quite agree with her. Still, he relented. As a Resurrectee, he was here precisely to realize the ambitions of Fujinomiya Shiori.

If the princess was willing to risk her life, overprotectiveness would be putting the cart before the horse.

In any era, it was necessary to pay a price in order to realize ambition.

...After understanding Shiori's feelings, Tachibana Masatsugu left the park.

Walking alone at the pier, he soon found a suitable target.

It was an infantry patrol unit with a British armored vehicle.

Masatsugu approached them. The plan was to raise a commotion, the bigger the better.

He recited the name of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada in his mind. It was the appellation of the personal sword swung by Hijikata Toshizō. A Japanese sword in its scabbard suddenly manifested in his left hand.

Successors were able to summon and dismiss the physical manifestations of Appellations at will.

The ten-odd British soldiers glared at the high schooler approaching them holding a sheathed sword in his left hand.

"Sorry," Masatsugu said to them, "I'll be going postal now on you guys from the Restoration Alliance. I will mercilessly cut down anyone who dares to stop me. Call your friends for help if you're not afraid to die."

Masatsugu slowly released noesis.

Instantly, Tachibana Masatsugu's elite troops of the "red-purple Kamuys" materialized.

A total of thirty Kanesadas. The operation to invade the Fuji tutelary fort and rescue the captured Chevaliers was officially beginning at last...

Part 4

Chevaliers were able to manifest armies of Legions with tangible bodies from their own noesis.

Using this ability, Chevaliers could infiltrate enemy cities or important facilities single-handedly to summon Legions to wreak malicious destruction—

Fighting war in such a dishonorable way was possible.

However, almost no one ever put it into practice. First of all, doing so would violate the Charter of Chivalry. It was also rather inefficient.

When far away from the stronghold where the tutelary pact was established, a Chevalier was unable to summon all of their Legions.

All Chevaliers paid close attention to this rule when going to battle.

Their Chevalier Strength was 10% when using Legions anywhere apart from their stronghold.

Furthermore, the various superpowers all placed tutelary forts near important cities to prevent terror attacks. Consequently, destruction via infiltration was very inefficient.

(One more factor was that Chevaliers belonged to the privileged class and could not be wasted on suicide missions.)

But this time, Masatsugu deliberately summoned Legions in an urban area—near a port.

Masatsugu's current Chevalier Strength was 302. Shiori had been sharing a bit of ectoplasmic fluid with him on a daily basis, plus what she gave him before the battle, finally allowing him to build up reserves to this level.

Unfortunately, summoning Legions outside of Suruga reduced their numbers to 10%—

These were the thirty that Masatsugu had summoned at Fuji City's port.

"Standby where you are and don't do anything," Masatsugu quietly ordered the Kanesadas under his command.

He did not have them fly. The red-purple Legions entered a circle formation on the ground with their bayonet rifles aimed outwards.

There was only one Kanesada inside the circle and Masatsugu was standing on its shoulder.

"A commotion seems to be starting."

Legions were roughly eight meters tall. Standing on one's shoulder would be equivalent to a third-floor balcony of an apartment building, treating him to a view of the entire harbor scenery.

Seeing the sudden appearance of winged giant soldiers, civilians fled for their lives.

People would stay indoors as much as possible during war but there were still crowds at port facilities, shops, factories, and houses.

Dozens of speakers in the city sounded an alarm.

Soldiers also fled. The unit of infantry patrol that Masatsugu provoked earlier had disappeared. Instead—

"They're here, huh?"

The Fuji tutelary fort sent out eighty-four Crusades.

The Crusades flew slowly, approaching from the western sky. The tutelary fort was west of the port, roughly one train stop away.

However, these eighty-four Crusades did not attack the Kanesadas immediately.

Their commander was aware that starting an urban battle with eyewitnesses around would run the risk of breaking the rule of "intentionally destroying civilian facilities" from the Charter of

Chivalry. It would be very troublesome to handle indictments after the fact.

The enemy formed a spherical formation in the air, observing the Kanesadas for movements.

Eighty-four versus thirty was quite a big disparity in numbers.

Masatsugu watched the tutelary fort calmly—The truly troublesome enemy was there.

They were separated by four or five kilometers. Masatsugu could clearly see the vortex of noesis and the eyeball in the sky.

The eyeball was humongous, its diameter surpassing sixty meters.

This was the shadow of the ifrit Morgan le Fay, or rather, an avatar. It was said that Morgan was a goddess of death from British fay folklore.

The eyeball of the goddess, reputedly death itself, stared intently at Masatsugu's army.

This was to allow offensive or defensive measures to be taken any time if necessary.

However, the eyeball did not make a move so far, so as to avoid wasting noesis and mystic power. Britain's ifrit seemed to be quite a seasoned warrior.

What Masatsugu hoped for was precisely this confidence and composure.

"Excellent."

The British Chevalier and ifrit were both waiting for him to make a move.

Masatsugu must not act lightly. His next step was to leave things to Hatsune and see if she could seize this opportunity to complete the mission.

"Are you mentally prepared, Hatsune?"

"O-Of course, Princess!"

Princess Shiori called to Hatsune, who straightened her back.

The two of them were in a park at the port of Dagonoura which offered a view of Suruga Bay's vast waters and a near view of Mount Fuji.

This scenery was beautiful but Hatsune was in no mood to enjoy.

Her relative, Tachibana Masatsugu, had set off thirty minutes ago. According to the plan, it was time for Tachibana Hatsune to enter the battlefield for the first time. However, there were so many uncertain factors.

"But the Legions I can summon are too few—*Just one*. That's not very reassuring..."

Currently, Hatsune's tentative Chevalier Strength was "just one."

Once she became more experienced, the number of Legions would increase, allowing her actual Chevalier Strength to be known. It was true that her combat power was not very reliable at the current stage.

However, Shiori said, "Not to worry, this actually suits your mission better. Just one *makes it harder for you to be discovered*."

In her role as strategist, Shiori was very confident, contrasting with the insecure Hatsune.

Hatsune did not know if she was trying to encourage her, or if she was actually confident of victory? Perhaps both.

"I will help you as much as possible, so just do what you can."

"Yes... Oh right, Rikka-sama will be angry later, right? After all, Princess, you are putting yourself at risk."

"That cannot be helped. We will simply have to apologize when the scolding comes."

"Got it, I will endure the scolding by your side!"

"Let us find some dirt on Rikka-sama another time. That way, we can strike back any time she nags too much."

Sometimes, Hatsune felt an urge to put away her clan's ruffian and larger-than-life ways to properly caution her lady, "Princess, you need to act more like a proper princess."

In any case, the time for the operation arrived during their conversation.

"Hatsune, proceed. Masatsugu-sama has summoned the Kanesadas!"

Shiori pointed at the sky—west of the Fuji tutelary fort.

The British army of eighty or so Crusades were flying towards the port of Dagonoura. They were advancing slowly at around fifty or sixty kilometers per hour because high-speed flight would consume a lot of ectoplasmic fluid.

There was also a gigantic eyeball in the sky over the tutelary fort.

This eye, an avatar of the ifrit Morgan le Fay, released powerful noesis. Its gaze was directed at a certain corner in the port.

Masatsugu had evidently put the plan into motion. Hatsune roared, "Upon my Appellation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune—Assemble, my Legions!"

One Legion, red and white in color, manifested.

Its appearance was basically the same as the Kamuy except with dark-red armor and a white garment on top. The top of the helmet was elongated like an *eboshi*, a type of headgear worn by court nobles in the past.

Like the Kanesada, Hatsune's Legion, "Kurou Hougan," was a variant of the Kamuy.

"Take me and the princess and fly to the tutelary fort—In one go, Kurou!"

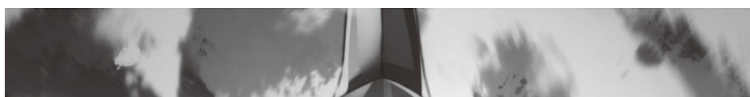
The soldier wearing the name of Kurou Yoshitsune reacted swiftly.

Slinging its rifle, the Legion bent down and picked up the two girls in its huge hands—

Then it flew up slowly, instantly accelerating to a hundred kilometers per hour.

The Kurou Hougan continued to speed up, heading straight for the Fuji tutelary fort.

However, it flew at a very low altitude, its feet almost about touch the roofs of two-story buildings.





Forced to keep a low profile, Hatsune could go no higher. Masatsugu had summoned Legions in the city to act as a diversion.

He was attracting attention from enemy Chevaliers and Morgan le Fay.

This was to delay the Fuji tutelary fort from noticing the approaching Kurou Hougan for as long as possible. Otherwise, the enemy would deploy a noesis barrier in such a situation.

Once a barrier was erected around the tutelary fort, getting in would be a huge challenge.

The park at the port was only a few kilometers from the tutelary fort. At their current speed, it would take less than five minutes.

However, just as there were only a couple hundred meters left...

Morgan le Fay's eyeball suddenly swiveled and caught sight of the approaching Kurou Hougan. Then a singing voice, resembling a solemn chorus, resounded throughout the sky.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.....

In concert with the singing, high-density noesis coalesced in the atmosphere.

A noesis barrier gradually took form to cover the Fuji tutelary fort. Noticing the signs, Hatsune hastily yelled, "Kurou Hougan! My power—I will share my blood with you, so fly even faster!"

Instantly, Hatsune almost fainted.

The symptoms resembled anemia and was due to Hatsune's rapid depletion of the ectoplasmic fluid she had stored up from the water shrine. Next, the Kurou Hougan accelerated with explosive power.

"Kyahhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Ughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh."

Hatsune screamed as though riding a roller coaster.

Shiori groaned in pain from the massive g-forces. Without the protective barrier that guarded a Legion's body, the passengers' bones would probably have shattered.

In any case, during the fraction of a second before the noesis barrier could be fully deployed...

The Kurou Hougan instantly dashed into the tutelary fort.

"Are you okay, Princess!?"

"D-Don't worry. Let us hurry and begin."

The Fuji tutelary fort's layout was similar to the one at Suruga.

Its premises covered an area roughly the size of five or six Tokyo Domes, surrounded by perimeter walls in a star shape.

There was a forty-meter-tall nation-protecting keep in the center with scattered buildings and warehouses elsewhere. Directly above the nation-protecting keep was a giant hovering eyeball.

Inside the fort, the Kurou Hougan lowered Shiori and Hatsune to the ground.

"W-When Chevaliers are captured, their Appellations are sealed first," said Shiori, trying her best to hold back her nausea.

Hatsune rushed over to steady her lady.

"Hence, it is necessary to summon a large team of noetic officers to activate the sealing mechanism. Both knights and Appellations release noetic waves... If we head to a strong source of noetic waves, it is highly likely we will find the captives."

In the midst of conversation, Shiori's breathing returned to normal and her tone recovered her usual fortitude.

"However, we must not stay in the enemy base for too long. Regardless whether the search succeeds or fails, we must retreat within ten minutes. Use the talismans when the time comes."

"Don't worry, I remembered to bring them!"

Hatsune took out folded A3-size pieces of thick paper from the front of her kimono.

They were two retainer beast talismans. Since they must not be lost, Hatsune immediately returned them to her bosom. After seeing the talismans, Shiori's body glowed golden.

At the same time, there was high-pitched ringing.

This was rumored to be a phenomenon when projecting strong noetic waves. Hatsune watched in wide-eyed astonishment.

"...There is something fishy about the building in the back. Let us proceed."

"Thank you very much—Kurou!"

At Hatsune's order, the red and white Legion lifted them up to its shoulders.

Shiori was on the left while Hatsune was on the right. The Kurou Hougan jumped gracefully, clearing a distance of two hundred meters and landing in front of the building indicated by the princess without causing any tremors.

The massive Kurou Hougan Legion landed noiselessly.

Such light movements were similar to those demonstrated by the young Yoshitsune in Hatsune's dream. Despite weighing dozens of tons, the Legion was as agile as a cat.

While feeling impressed, Hatsune did not neglect to give orders.

"Open a hole in the wall to let us look inside. We need to confirm who's in there!"

There was a seven-story pitch-black building in front of them.

This style of architecture could be found in trendy office buildings downtown. However, this was a tutelary fort and all buildings were military facilities. Thus, one could damage them without holding back at all.

The Kurou Hougan delivered an acute right punch, puncturing the outer wall on the second floor.

In the face of a Legion's arm strength, steel-reinforced concrete was no different from a paper door. The Kurou Hougan withdrew its fist, leaving a giant hole in the side of the building, which provided a

view of the office furniture inside.

In the same manner, the Kurou Hougan opened up additional holes in the building.

In the fourth hole, they found several men in the military uniforms of Imperial Japan.

Meanwhile, at the port of Dagonoura...

Masatsugu's thirty Kanesadas continued to face off against the eighty or so Crusades.

The army of Kanesadas continued to maintain a circle with rifles aimed outwards.

In contrast, the Crusades were diagonally above, overlooking the circle.

They were in a line formation dozens of meters in the air with rifles aimed at the Kanesadas on the ground.

"They don't dare to attack recklessly, huh...? What a great help," Masatsugu muttered to himself. The enemy's caution was in his favor.

The Crusades in the air were in a row. Behind them, riding a white wyvern was a British Chevalier. A man in his prime.

The man had his wyvern circling while he watched the Japanese Legions for movements.

Presumably, this was because Masatsugu had not ordered his Legions to attack. Since a while ago, Masatsugu had simply engaged in a profound silent demonstration.

Fighting in populous urban areas would ultimately be against the Charter of Chivalry. Hence, the British army did not dare fire first. They did not wish to actively violate the rules and sow seeds for trouble.

The thirty Kanesada emitted protective barrier particles from their entire bodies.

Barrier particles usually glowed white but the Kanesada's were red-purple, the same color as their armor. Moreover, the Kanesadas were exuding more than the glow of the protective barrier.

All Kanesadas were giving off frightening *bloodlust*, determined to cut through all obstacles in their path.

This terrifying aura undoubtedly belonged to the "Merciless" Shinsengumi Vice-Commander.

"Attack!"

Masatsugu ordered his army and the Kanesadas entered the flat seigan stance.

The eighty-something Crusades on alert in the sky also deployed a protective barrier and reflexively pulled their triggers. They were probably intimidated by the katana-wielding army's bloodlust and terrifying aura.

Naturally, the Crusades were targeting the thirty Kanesadas in a circle formation on the ground.

Just as the rifles shot beams capable of vaporizing asphalt...

Masatsugu's army kicked the ground and took flight. Instead of dashing at the Crusade army in front of them, they made a detour around the enemy and continued to accelerate fiercely.

It turned out that the Kanesada army was flying to the Fuji tutelary fort at high speed!

A rain of flashing light struck the thirty Kanesadas' former location from two seconds ago.

Already firing, the Crusades were unable to track the Kanesadas with their beams in time. Masatsugu had executed a feint using bloodlust precisely to take advantage of this.

The pier at the port was less than five kilometers from the Fuji tutelary fort.

The Kanesadas flew over the city, leaving residential areas. It only took ten-odd seconds to reach the beautiful natural scenery of the wetlands.

The protective barrier around the Legions shielded Masatsugu from the effects of speed and g-forces.

"Ignore the lightning. Go straight ahead."

Along the way, the Kanesada's encountered descending lightning strikes.

A meteorological decree invoked by the ifrit Morgan le Fay.

Fortunately, the thirty Kanesadas were in a packed spherical formation. The protective barrier would be able to withstand several seconds of continuous lightning strikes.

The star-shaped walls of the tutelary fort came into sight.

However, a non-physical shield—the noesis barrier—was blocking the way. Unless the barrier was removed, there was no way to break inside the tutelary fort.

"Next task—Penetrate!"

From atop a Kanesada in the center of the spherical formation, Masatsugu issued orders to the whole army.

This was a "word of kill" ordaining certain death. First, four Kanesadas accelerated and left the spherical formation to collide with one part of the noesis barrier.

The four Kanesadas formed a row while extending their katanas with both hands.

Four katanas stabbed into the noesis barrier. The remaining twenty-five Kanesadas rushed with full momentum behind the earlier four and pushed their backs in unison. Only the Kanesada carrying

Masatsugu did not take action.

This attack opened up a series of four holes in the noesis barrier.

The holes of similar size grew, finally becoming one big hole. The twenty-nine Legions under Masatsugu rushed into the tutelary fort.

The Kanesadas' katana offensive even managed to slice through a small part of an impregnable noesis barrier—

This was the power of the renowned blade Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada's Feat of Arms—Gankouken. Its effect was to bestow Legions with Hijikata Toshizō's weapon and infantry tactics for slaughtering enemies with swordsmanship.

A Kamuy-like Legion flew over to the Kanesada army that had created the huge hold.

"Onii-sama, you really came!"

The Kamuy had red armor with a white garment on top—A Kurou Hougan Legion.

Hatsune was sitting on its right shoulder. A shoulder was not a particularly stable spot, but Chevaliers and Legions were linked by mystic power, so cases of Chevaliers falling off were extremely rare.

Hatsune looked calm and composed, evidently getting used to a Chevalier's powers.

Two blue wyverns came flying from behind. Shiori had told Hatsune to bring retainer beast talismans, so the wyverns must have manifested from them.

Shiori was riding on of the wyverns which had a saddle to sit on.

The second wyvern was carrying three Japanese men dressed in uniforms of military officers. They all looked gloomy and listless, but fortunately, their lives were not in danger.

Thus, the "princess and her knights" converged successfully, exiting the noesis barrier.

"Princess, are you okay?"

"Yes, nothing to worry about. Thank you for your efforts too, Masatsugu-sama."

"What about those three?"

Masatsugu looked at the three Chevaliers who had almost become hostages.

They were young men between twenty and thirty years of age. Their names were respectively Habuna, Maike, and Tabi. The three of them thanked Masatsugu meekly. Unfortunately, their Appellations were sealed and had to be unsealed at Suruga before they could summon Kamuys again.

From his Legion's shoulder, Masatsugu jumped behind the princess, onto the wyvern she was riding.

The two of them sat on one saddle to ride the same wyvern. This was to help out Shiori who was not a skilled rider. Just as they were about to escape—

"Onii-sama, over there!"

Masatsugu looked as directed, turning his head towards the port.

The eighty-odd Crusades he had left behind were gradually approaching. Their movement speed was not high and they had already aimed their rifles at Masatsugu's group. Just as he was pondering how to escape—

Hatsune said from the Kurou Hougan's shoulder.

"Wait, leave the rest to me!"

"What did you say?"

"I feel it—Yoshitsune's Appellation says he's got a good plan."

Hatsune was not a proper Chevalier yet, but her abilities were definitely developing. Sensing that she had an idea, Masatsugu

noded and said, "Got it. Go ahead and try it out."

"Yeah, I got this!" Hatsune replied energetically then slowly lowered her voice. "...When penetrating enemy territory, know locations to avoid and identify poorly guarded lines of retreat to ensure certain escape. Charge the enemy, break their formation, take no prisoners. Behold my Feat of Arms—Kotouhisshutsu!"

As Masatsugu predicted, Hatsune was going to invoke a Feat of Arms.

After reciting a mantra that sounded like principles from a military classic, Hatsune said loudly, "Onii-sama, follow me!"

The Kurou Hougan released powerful noesis and flew west.

In front of them were the eighty-odd Crusades that Masatsugu had confronted at the pier. In spite of that, Masatsugu did as told and ordered his Legions to follow.

The thirty Kanesadas caught up with the Kurou Hougan that had moved out first.

...Immediately, the view before their eyes changed dramatically.

Spontaneously, their army had arrived in the sky over the Fuji River. It was the river they had reached a few hours ago, traveling by Mibu wolves to cross the mountains.

"What?"

The Fuji River's did not have a huge quantity of water flowing through it. Its gravelly sandbanks and shores were very striking.

The tutelary fort was roughly ten kilometers from the Fuji River. Unbelievably, their army had traversed this distance instantaneously. Furthermore, Masatsugu and the others had not experienced any sensation of "high-speed flight."

Following the Kurou Hougan, they had arrived here "just like that."

There was no feeling of speed or g-forces. The Kanesada army had

not consumed any ectoplasmic fluid either.

"It appears that Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Feat of Arms..." Shiori said with surprise all over her face.

During the process, the Kanesadas and the wyverns continued to fly west—in other words, towards Suruga. They crossed the Fuji River and came to the sky over the highland forests of Mount Oomaru, Mount Kanamaru, Mount Amagoi, and Mount Arashi.

"...Can achieve instantaneous movement so long as the distance is not too great—A type of teleportation power. Perhaps it is a reenactment of the legends of the Hyodori-goe surprise assault and jumping over eight ships."

"P-P-P-P-Probably, Princess..."

Of everyone present, only Hatsune was out of breath.

She looked like she had just finished a sprinting competition. This Feat of Arms evidently took a huge toll on the Chevalier leading the army.

Hatsune was so tired that her eyes were spinning. Masatsugu ordered the Kanesadas to stop mid-flight.

The wyverns carrying him, Shiori, and the three Chevaliers also stopped. The wyverns flapped their wings, hovering in one place in the air.

Meanwhile, the exhausted Hatsune said proudly, "A-Anyway, now that we're here, all that's left to do is run as fast as we can! Our operation was a success!"

"...No, it is still too early to say that."

Masatsugu observed Fuji City from where they had just traversed using teleportation.

Over in the air above the tutelary fort, Morgan le Fay's gigantic eye avatar remained manifested. Its gaze was directed straight at Masatsugu and company.

A Chevalier's sharp instincts informed Masatsugu.

The eyeball's noetic waves and gaze were following them relentlessly.

"Morgan le Fay has not lost our trail. It knows where we are."

"Huh!?" Hatsune exclaimed in surprise.

A "voice" was instantly heard in this airspace.

(Precisely, so... Chevaliers of Japan. I am, the genie Morrigan. The controller of the ifrit Morgan le Fay.)

It was not a real human voice but sound formed from noetic waves.

The soprano voice sounded adorable, but the tone was a bit choppy.

The source was *overhead*. A giant eyeball, seven or eight meters in diameter, was hovering in the air above, surrounded by a powerful vortex of noetic waves.

Its appearance was very similar to the gigantic eyeball over the Fuji tutelary fort.

(Give up, on your futile escape. Even if you land, and hide in the mountains, I, the spirit Morrigan, will never lose your trail. I will definitely, catch you.)

Sure enough, nothing was ever easy on the battlefield.

Masatsugu shrugged. Whatever. In truth, he did not really care. After all, he was prepared to fight all-out to retreat. However, his brow furrowed slightly when he heard the following notice.

(Also, here is some unfortunate news, for you. Morrigan originally asked, a Chevalier at the Fuji tutelary fort... Sir Gary to pursue you. But now, another Chevalier happened to return.)

Could it be Richard the Lionheart?

Masatsugu frowned and pondered. Did the Resurrectee whose chase

took him in Motosu's direction return? However, an even worse scenario overturned Masatsugu's hypothesis.

(This person has flippant tendencies despite being the commander-in-chief. This time, he will surely take care of you personally.)

"Morrigan! Don't you have anything better to say than calling me 'flippant'?"

A young voice suddenly interrupted, retorting against the comment delivered through noetic waves.

Instantly, a rider on a British white wyvern arrived. He was dressed in a black military officer's uniform. A handsome man with silver hair.

Unmistakably, he was the Chevalier whom Masatsugu had spotted from afar, the day he swore his oath of fealty to Shiori.

Masatsugu was very certain, this was none other but Edward the Black Prince himself.

Chapter 4 - Knights of Britain

Part 1

"Hohohoho, when I heard there were signs of the Tōkaidō army mobilizing at Motosu, I did not believe it was necessary to rush back."

Riding gallantly on a white wyvern, the young man was the epitome of an aristocrat.

A silver-haired handsome man. The British military officer uniform looked neat and stylish on him, while his poise and comportment conveyed natural and effortless elegance.

"Fortunately, I changed my mind. It was worth it to rush back via transport aircraft and a wyvern. I finally have a chance to meet you."

The English aristocrat looked straight at Masatsugu.

His wyvern was hovering in the air, just like the two wyverns and all Legions on the Japanese side. However, his sharp gaze was fixed only on Masatsugu.

"I apologize for my previous rudeness. My name is Edward and many people call me the Black Prince."

A smile conveying some kind of certainty appeared on the handsome face of the aristocratic Resurrectee.

"Please do introduce yourself today."

"Tachibana Masatsugu."

"I have never heard this name before. May I ask when were you born in this country?"

"Sorry, I can't answer that," Masatsugu replied indifferently. Rather than giving him a cold shoulder on purpose, Masatsugu's inborn personality was to do things at his own pace. This naturally led to a lack of enthusiasm in his tone.

In contrast, Edward smiled cheerfully.

"I understand now! Until a few days ago, I had to live my days under an alias too. I presume the case is the same for you?"

Masatsugu glanced at his companions.

Hatsune, sitting on the Kurou Hougan's shoulder, and the three Chevaliers on a wyvern were listening to the Black Prince questioningly. They did not know that Masatsugu was a Resurrectee.

As for Princess Shiori's reaction...

She was riding the same wyvern with Masatsugu, staring intently at the Black Prince.

"Very well, what I am going to say next comes from a knight's desire for a duel between warriors, rather than being 'flippant' as my guardian spirit Morrigan worded it."

Ignoring the princess' gaze, Edward spoke openly, "Ladies and gentlemen, would you be so kind as to forgive my knights for the rudeness of standing in your way?"

"Whether we forgive them or not, you're still going to block us, right?"

"Hohohoho, you are certainly quick on the uptake. How splendid."

(...Prince. Fuji City and its vicinity, is not your stronghold. Your Chevalier Strength is down to 10%. Should I send, Sir Gary to converge with you?)

This was spoken through Morgan le Fay's noetic waves.

The giant eyeball, "Morgan's Eye," which Masatsugu and company had spotted overhead, was now watching over her smirking commander-in-chief.

Edward rejected her suggestion, "Isn't my uncle currently at the Fuji tutelary fort? Assign Gary to defense. Since Tachibana-dono has

made a personal appearance, it is possible the Tōkaidō army might attempt a sneak attack."

(Affirmative.)

"Tachibana-dono... Shall we begin?"

His aristocratic voice almost sounded like an invitation to Masatsugu for a game of chess.

Edward pulled back on the wyvern's reins as one would a horse, distancing himself from Masatsugu's group. Despite the casual tone of his voice, the Black Prince was leaking powerful noesis from his body and soul.

After pulling back a hundred meters, he finally unleashed burgeoning noesis!

Shiori's body also glowed golden for a few seconds.

"Hatsune, take the three Chevaliers and land. I have called for *reinforcements* on the ground. Use their help to escape back to Suruga as quickly as possible."

"U-Understood. What about you and Onii-sama, Princess?"

"We will follow presently. No need to worry."

Shiori commanded solemnly, preventing Hatsune from asking further questions.

Hatsune hastily directed the Kurou Hougan Legion to descend, taking along the wyvern that was carrying the three Chevaliers.

They disappeared into the Tōkaidō mountain forest below.

With only Masatsugu remaining by her side, Shiori sighed.

"Princess, personally, I hope you will escape together with them."

"If you truly believe that I am of no use, I shall comply."

Having asked unwanted bystanders to leave, Shiori was now

retorting nonchalantly to Masatsugu.

Her response brought a smile to Masatsugu's face.

Should one be impressed or exasperated? As a princess, Shiori had no desire to stay in the back ranks to be protected. After comparing Masatsugu and the enemy's combat strength, she made the call to "fight alongside him." She was going to draw upon all her talents to find a way out of the predicament.

This temperament did not suit a figurehead liege, but for a comrade for realizing ambition together, it was pretty good.

"Then please keep me company for now."

"Gladly!"

Unlike these pair of liege and retainer, Edward was making battle preparations of his own.

In a sonorous voice, he commanded the noesis he had released.

"Shame be to him who thinks ill of it. Gather upon my name of Edward the Black Prince to uphold knightly honor—My personal guard, the Order of the Garter!"

A pitch-black army appeared out of thin air next to Edward.

The Black Prince possessed superior Legions in the form of black Crusades while the Lionheart had his crimson knights. Edward's army numbered a round 100 here.

Chevaliers were only able to summon 10% of their limit when outside their stronghold.

In other words, summoning a hundred Legions here implied that Edward's true Chevalier Strength had exceeded 1000!

In contrast, Tachibana Masatsugu's army consisted of merely thirty. Not only was he facing a numerical disadvantage of more than three to one, but the enemy was also a famous military genius from English history. This battle was on a different league than the one

just now.

Masatsugu kicked his wyvern lightly.

Understanding Masatsugu, the retainer beast retreated behind the Kanesadas.

Riding the same wyvern, the princess was leaning against Masatsugu's bosom. Her body was stiff from nervousness and fear.

One could hardly blame her. After all, this was her first battle.

However, the smart princess said bravely, "Masatsugu-sama, please do not worry about me. You have free rein!"

"Understood. In any case, I'll just go with the flow and do what's natural."

Masatsugu glanced secretly somewhere.

Hovering over there was a giant eyeball, seven or eight meters in diameter. Morgan le Fay's avatar was overlooking the battlefield.

Masatsugu whispered quietly, "Achieving the objective will require quite a lot of effort."

"...Then I shall inform you when a suitable opportunity arises," Shiori replied naturally, prompting Masatsugu to gaze at her.

Due to the emergency, Masatsugu did not explain his approach in detail, but the clever princess had deduced his thoughts from his gaze and the current circumstances.

It was also possibly due to their relationship of increasing intimacy in various ways.

Embarrassed by his gaze, Shiori blushed and turned her head away.

"Masatsugu-sama, the battle has begun!"

"Excuse me."

Masatsugu ordered his thirty Kanesadas to gather into a packed

sphere.

A spherical formation was not particularly interesting, but it did offer defense in all directions. Incidentally, the katanas used at Fuji City earlier had all turned back into bayonet rifles.

The effects of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada's Feat of Arms had vanished. Conversely, Edward suddenly activated his own!

"The nostalgic Battle of Crécy... It is time to relive that day's triumph. O Knights of the Garter, uphold England's pride and turn into archers!"

Of the hundred black knights, a change occurred to forty of them.

Their bayonet rifles turned into steel longbows, just as the Kanesadas could suddenly turn their weapons into the renowned blade, Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada.

"Archers back away. Remaining knights serve as vanguard!"

The Black Prince's Legions were called Knights of the Garter.

They followed their lord's orders and changed their formation.

In front of the forty archers, the remaining sixty Garter Knights formed a packed rectangular formation in an array of ten rows by six columns.

This closer-order formation was like a "wall in the sky."

The archers in the back were shielded by the sixty Legions in the vanguard.

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

The two Resurrectees gave the command simultaneously.

However, the actions taken by their respective soldiers were completely different.

In the packed sphere of the thirty Kanesadas, only the Legions on the front side fired their bayonet rifles.

The "wall in the sky" of the vanguard Garter Knights took on the barrage. However, they did not return fire, simply deploying a protective barrier to withstand the Kanesadas' shooting—

The British barrier neutralized all the heat beams from the Japanese side.

The archers at the back attacked on behalf of the unmoving "wall."

Nocking arrows of light onto the black longbows, they aimed upwards towards the sky. The released arrows traced out parabolic trajectories to attack the Kanesadas' spherical formation.



The British and the Japanese sides kept firing.

The bayonet rifles used by the thirty Kanesadas were able to fire ten beams per second.

In comparison, the British side's forty archers fired much slower. The whole process from nocking to releasing took at least five to ten seconds. The archers were highly skilled but the speed of modern fully automatic fire was overwhelming.

However.

"O-Our side is losing in the shootout!?"

"*As suspected*, the enemy's projectiles are stronger..."

Shiori was greatly surprised whereas Masatsugu nodded. They were watching the battle between Legions from behind. The arrows of light were piercing the armor and gigantic bodies of the thirty Kanesadas up ahead of them.

The Kanesada army's protective barrier *completely failed to defend against* the black English longbowmen's consecutive firing.

In contrast, the beams fired by the rifles could not hit any enemies. The protective barrier of the sixty Legions in the "wall in the sky" remained secure and impregnable.

"Well, I already knew they were no ordinary bows and arrows."

Last time in Suruga, Masatsugu was almost sniped by the same kind of bow and arrow.

Now, he was able to witness the firepower he had predicted back then.

After exchanging fire for a minute or two, the Kanesadas were desperately protecting their master, making use of their helmets and various armor to block the arrows or decrease their power.

However, the rain of arrows continued to fall mercilessly upon the Kanesadas.

Seven Kanesadas had already died, either shot in the vitals through gaps in their armor or succumbing to accumulated damage. These seven crashed down from the sky just like that.

"Do you see this, Tachibana-dono? This is the prided *mode anglais* formation of my House of Plantagenet—English longbow tactics! How will you respond to that!?"

"I see."

The Black Prince sounded like he was exhibiting a treasure. Masatsugu replied indifferently.

"So using bows for both offense and defense roles is this so-called English style."

Currently, Tachibana Masatsugu was over a hundred meters away from Edward.

Even so, Masatsugu knew what the other side was thinking. It was probably the same for Edward. In an encounter between first-rate chess players, simply looking at the situation on the board would be enough to read each other's minds without any need for redundant conversation.

As expert tacticians, Masatsugu and Edward were on such a level.

"Masatsugu-sama..."

"Looks like we have to give up on shooting."

Masatsugu gently embraced the worried Shiori.

The two of them were riding the same wyvern. The princess' light back and body weight was leaning against Masatsugu's bosom while she was holding his left hand tightly in her hands.

She was touching her trusted knight to relieve the fear and uncertainty in her heart.

"All men draw your swords. The blades will be your *shields*."

Feeling the princess' delicate body against him, Masatsugu issued a new command.

The rifles of the remaining twenty-three Kanesadas turned into Japanese swords again. They kept their swords vertically upright in front of their faces to guard their bodies' center line.

Namely, the vertical line passing through the forehead, the nose, the throat, the sternum, and the crotch.

Using the sword to guard the center meant that a slight movement of the wrist would be enough to parry arrows aimed at the face, the heart, or other vitals of the body.

The barrier-penetrating arrows were now blocked by Hijikata Toshizō's beloved sword.

"Hohohoho. Not a bad solution, but it is nowhere enough."

"You're right."

The Black Prince smiled while Tachibana Masatsugu remained expressionless.

The battle between Legions gradually intensified. The black archers continued to shoot repeatedly. Although the Kanesadas were using swords to guard their vitals near the center line, their bodies were still getting pierced by numerous arrows.

The most serious wounds were inflicted on the limbs, bleeding blue blood.

Ectoplasmic fluid was the energy source driving Legions. Excessive loss of ectoplasmic fluid would naturally stop movement. Another three Kanesadas fell from the sky due to excessive injuries.

At this rate, defeat was inevitable even if the rate of Legions dying had decreased.

"Charge the defending black knights. Make it quick."

Masatsugu ordered the Kanesadas whose numbers had decreased sharply to twenty.

The Kanesada army executed the command dutifully. Accelerating at the "wall in the sky" formed by the sixty Garter Knights, they unleashed Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship—

Even with numerical superiority on their side, it was possible for normal Crusades to become careless and lose in this kind of situation.

However, the rifles vanished from the hands of the black knights in the "wall" ahead.

What took their place was a rectangular shield as tall as a Legion. Holding shields in both hands, the Garter Knights resisted the Shinsengumi's vicious swords.

The swordsmanship that had sliced through many a Crusade's armor could not cut through these shields!

"Shame be to him who thinks ill of it... My knights, you are protected by the insignia of the garter. Now raise your shields of justice to triumph over evil!"

These were the holy words used by the Black Prince to invoke his Feat of Arms.

The short inscription of "Honi soit qui mal y pense," resembling Latin, and a cross appeared on each shield wielded by the Garter Knights.

"The power to block Hijikata Toshizō's sword... A Feat of Arms of the shield, huh?" Masatsugu muttered to himself while observing the battle from a distance.

The army of black knights were hiding behind shields. No matter how fierce, the moves of Tennen Rishin Style could not win so easily. Every free-flowing swing of the sword was deflected by a shield.

Also, while the Kanesadas were busy attacking the shield bearers...

The archers originally in the back had circled behind the army of katana-wielding Kanesadas.

Returning their longbows to bayonet rifles, they attacked the red-purple Japanese army from behind—in melee combat!

...Sandwiched front and back by the Garter Knights, the Kanesadas' defeat was sealed.

Succeeding in their pincer attack, the British Legions swung the

Previously, the British Crusades had used the same tactic in their attack on Suruga.

(—Prince, reporting. Enemy, starting noetic disruption. Avatar, cannot be sustained...)

The voice reported the situation in fragments. The hovering seven or eight-meter-diameter eyeball—Morgan le Fay's manifestation—slowly vanished.

Seeing his guardian spirit defeated, Edward praised, "Oh? You still managed to blow away Morrigan in an instant despite your unfavorable situation?"

"It worked in one shot precisely because of the unfavorable situation. Otherwise, a spirit of that level isn't going to present any openings."

Edward and Masatsugu muttered simultaneously as though having a face-to-face conversation.

Masatsugu had reasoned that using noetic disruption recklessly would not achieve much.

The enemy was a spirit of the strongest class on the British side. However, no matter how powerful a spirit, it would be only natural for her concentration to slip when seeing her master winning with an overwhelming advantage.

Even if not to the point of carelessness, there would undoubtedly be a decrease in focus.

Shiori had been increasing her senses as a noetic master, looking for an opening in the opponent.

As for Masatsugu—the moment before *landing on the ground*...

He first had the Kanesadas start a War Cry, then carrying the exhausted Shiori in his arms, he swiftly kicked his wyvern's side, ordering it to make a rapid descent.

The wyvern flapped its wings and landed in the mountain forest.

A giant white wolf was already waiting on the ground.

This was one of the Mibu wolves they had ridden to the Fuji River then dismissed back into the forest. Masatsugu quickly got off the wyvern and moved Shiori, who was unable to walk, to the Mibu wolf's back.

"We succeeded, Masatsugu-sama..."

"Yes, with that spirit gone, we won't need to worry about noetic tracking. Now we can escape deep into the mountains without having to watch our back."

Holding the feebly smiling Shiori in his arms, Masatsugu rode the Mibu wolf.

Once again, the two of them were riding the same retainer beast, except this time they were escaping on land. Hiding in the mountain forest was definitely better than flying in the air since their goal was to evade enemy pursuit.

Weaving through the trees in the mountain forest, the Mibu wolf raced as fast as the wind.

Needless to say, their destination was Suruga City.

"Thank you for your support, Princess. We couldn't have escaped otherwise."

"No... Without you in command, Masatsugu-sama, we would have been wiped out long ago... I should be the one to express gratitude..."

The brave princess had been sticking closely to Masatsugu for a reason.

While relieving her fear and uncertainty on one hand, she was also providing a small amount of ectoplasmic fluid to him through intimate contact on the other. In fact, the Garter Knights' fierce offensive had dealt a heavy blow to the Kanesadas, causing ectoplasmic fluid consumption to be much higher than usual..

Without Shiori's assistance, the Kanesadas might not have had the strength to unleash the final roar—

In any case, Masatsugu "went with the flow and did what was natural" and succeeded in upholding the principle of "escaping as quickly as possible from a battlefield of certain defeat."

"It looks like Tachibana-dono does not share the knightly ideal of putting up a manly fight. He fled with such speed and decisiveness."

On the saddle of his wvyern that was flapping its wings, Edward smiled wryly.

The last of the red-purple Legions had just been wiped out in front of his eyes.

Instantly killing nine survivors was a piece of cake. Only the Black Prince, his wyvern, and the Order of the Garter remained in the aerial battlefield.

"I could burn the whole mountain to conduct a search... but it is unlikely that he would loiter in the vicinity."

Edward looked down at the mountain forest, shrugging his shoulders.

He recalled the girl who was leaning against Tachibana Masatsugu's chest. He originally thought she was simply along the ride for some kind of reason and did not pay much attention to her—

"That girl has an air quite similar to Eleanor's. She seems to be well-versed in noetics too..."

The beautiful maiden's noble and pretty face and platinum blonde hair were very striking.

Edward decided he should investigate her background.

Tachibana Hatsune was running through the forest at full speed.

Of course, she was using a Mibu wolf to do the running, instead of running on foot.

The reinforcements Princess Shiori had mentioned before parting ways were a reference to this white mid-size retainer beast. A second Mibu wolf was carrying the three Chevaliers they had just rescued.

"I hope the princess and Onii-sama are fine..."

So far, there were no signs of the lady she served and the young man from her clan catching up.

Just as she was worrying about their safety, Hatsune sensed someone sneering behind her. She had some recollection of this very sarcastic voice.

Not too long ago, she had heard the same voice prior to activating the Feat of Arms—Kotouhihisshutsu.

...Hatsune had recalled how the voice offered to teach her a good plan. Then the principles to using that secret move had surfaced in her mind. In other words, Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune was giving advice again.

Hatsune focused to listen. Sure enough, the blue scroll appeared in her right hand.

"What's up, Yoshitsune-san?"

The scroll told her that her friends were out of danger... At least, that was the message Hatsune sensed.

"Really!? They still haven't shown up, and I was worried sick. This is great news!"

...Well, with that dead fish in charge, failure would come as a surprise.

"Are you talking about Onii-sama? Well, it's true that he's not a very lively person."

Talking to herself in front of a scroll was quite a bizarre scene.

However, Hatsune was not in the mood to make fun of herself, because she learned a shocking truth without any mental preparation beforehand.

...That isn't what I meant. That man and I are the same. In other words, we were awakened from our ancient deaths.

"Huh?"

Hatsune jumped in shock. *Now*, she really doubted whether her ears were hallucinating or not.

Part 2

The expedition to Fuji City had unfolded with unexpected developments.

After surviving many trials, Masatsugu finally brought Shiori back to Suruga. Along the way, they met up with Hatsune and the three Chevaliers who had almost ended up as hostages. No one was left behind. Also, they had gathered quite a lot of information—

However, Akigase Rikka could not help but frown after listening to the report.

"Perhaps I should not be saying this after requesting your aid, Your Highness..."

Rikka was in the castellan's office, grumbling to Shiori and Masatsugu.

"What would we do if anything happened to our imperial princess? Please understand the importance of your safety."

"I am terribly sorry. Due to the emergency situation, I overstepped my bounds."

The scolded princess apologized obediently, demonstrating contrition in her words and behavior in a perfect performance of docility. Truly an inexperienced actress. In the end, Rikka did not pursue the matter very far.

Thanks to the princess risking herself, three Chevaliers were rescued.

The three young Chevaliers were named Habuna, Maike, and Tabi, members of the Tōkaidō provincial army stationed at Yamanashi. Each of their Chevalier Strength was about 50.

The noetic officers at the Suruga tutelary fort unsealed their Appellations for them.

"I do appreciate gaining more subordinates, who need to be looked after, in this manner. Until Nagoya issues directions, let them stay in Suruga for now."

Rikka grinned and did not complain any further about the princess' recklessness.

The three new additions to their forces also brought unexpected effects. They excitedly told their fellow soldiers in the Suruga tutelary fort about what they had seen and heard.

Namely, the conversation between Edward the Black Prince and Tachibana Masatsugu during the retreat battle.

'Until a few days ago, I had to live my days under an alias too. I presume the case is the same for you?'

The Resurrectee leading the British forces had said something profound.

Added to the original rumors about Masatsugu's identity, a "certain conviction" began to spread among the Suruga soldiers.

Indeed, everyone was deeply convinced that Tachibana Masatsugu's true identity was precisely Hijikata Toshizō.

The next day after their return from Fuji City—

Masatsugu had accompanied the princess to the tutelary fort. While they were there, they separated at some point.

While he was taking a stroll alone, the soldiers and officers' attitudes towards him was clearly more careful and polite than before. The three Chevaliers, Habuna, Maike, and Tabi even went out of their way to greet him.

At every opportunity, they would discreetly ask Masatsugu, "Tachibana-dono... You are Lord Hijikata, right?"

Every time, Masatsugu reacted indifferently.

"No." "I have no idea." "Not really." "Who knows?" "You've got the

wrong guy, I think?" "Don't believe in weird rumors."

Masatsugu simply repeated denials monotonously. He could not be bothered to explain the reason.

Humans were creatures that only believed what they wanted to believe. No matter how much Masatsugu denied it, they always left with a "He is Lord Hijikata..." look on their face.

After handling these questions, Masatsugu ran into the mess hall reserved for high-ranking officers.

The restricted mess hall was only open to Chevaliers and soldiers holding the rank of field officer or above, hence there were few users. Masatsugu took a seat, hoping this should reduce the amount of hassle.

At that moment, Hatsune arrived, wearing an angry expression for once.

Masatsugu expected she had come to talk nonsense after hearing about the Hijikata Toshizō rumor.

"Whether you are really Hijikata Toshizō or not, Onii-sama, I'll save that question for another time. So the *real Tachibana Masatsugu* who used to play with me in childhood... He's already dead?"

Hatsune pursued the core of the matter right off the bat.

"I see... So you admitted to Hatsune regarding your identity as a Resurrectee?"

"Yes, I told her at my own discretion."

This was the next morning after he had had a good long talk with the young maiden of the Tachibana clan.

Masatsugu had come to the Black Lily Dorm, reserved exclusively for the princess, to meet his liege in the conversation lounge.

"I don't know my real name, I was summoned to the present world

by the princess' divine power, the real Tachibana Masatsugu has been dead for years, etc. That was the main gist of it."

"It cannot be helped. The truth had to come out eventually."

Shiori sighed lightly.

In the past, she often drank black tea in the conversation lounge, but currently, all she had before her was a glass of water.

Suruga's food problem was getting worse with each passing day. Luxury items such as coffee, black tea, and alcoholic beverages were in scarce supply. Even the princess could not enjoy them freely.

"That explains why I have not seen her since yesterday..."

"She must be in shock, finding out her relative had died and that I'm someone unrelated."

"That would be inconvenient. It would not do to be distracted by such trivial troubles... She has so many responsibilities riding on her."

Tachibana Hatsune was Princess Shiori's lady-in-waiting, bodyguard, and Chevalier.

Of course, competence and professionalism were essential. There was nothing wrong with what Shiori had said. However, the beautiful princess added dryly, "Well, I will turn a blind eye if she wants some time to put her feelings in order. Showing a bit of leniency to subordinates is a part of employee benefits, after all."

"I see."

"Masatsugu-sama, are you smirking?"

"You are imagining things. I never knew you had a naive side too, Princess."

"Well, it was a slip of the tongue!"

Just as the liege and retainer were having this kind of conversation...

A patter of hurried footsteps approached the conversation lounge and the door was flung open forcefully. Dressed in *Haikara-san* style, Hatsune rushed in excitedly and said, "Princess, Onii-sama! Maybe Onii-sama's real identity is Oda Nobunaga!?"

Charging in energetically in one breath, Hatsune proposed a bold hypothesis.

After a moment of silence, Shiori remarked with slight disappointment, "...Didn't you say that she was in shock?"

"It seemed that way yesterday," Masatsugu replied expressionlessly.

In any case, they looked at Hatsune, who was acting her usual self. Shiori offered care and concern for the still cheerful girl, "So, have you put your feelings in order?"

"Oh, yes. It's sad that my distant relative had passed away, and I'd like to pay respects at his grave too. However, your ambitions come first, Princess, so it can't be helped."

"...I am certainly grateful you understand that."

"Not at all, this is the Tachibana clan's duty, after all."

The princess was quite surprised by this turn of events while Hatsune responded cheerfully.

The ability to swiftly change mindsets was a warrior's asset too. Feeling impressed instead, Masatsugu said, "Are you going to keep addressing me the same way?"

"Why not? Your name is definitely 'Tachibana Masatsugu' in the family registry. Plus changing the habit will be a pain at this point. Besides, now that I think about it..."

Hatsune lowered her voice as though whispering.

"There are many people with unknown identities among the 'aunties

and uncles' who only show up to family gatherings and memorial services. Compared to those relatives, Onii-sama, my relationship with you is definitely more real and substantial. Don't worry, I'm fine."

In a certain way, this happy-go-lucky disposition was also a hero's requisite quality.

Furthermore, it was supposedly Hatsune's father in the capital Tokyo who set up Masatsugu to take over the identity of the original who had died in an accident.

"Back to the main issue here. Why can't Onii-sama's real identity be Oda Nobunaga?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Speaking of Japanese heroes, it pretty much boils down to the trio of Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu, right? But Toyotomi Hideyoshi looked like a monkey while Tokugawa Ieyasu was a pudgy guy like a tanuki, so their appearances don't match Onii-sama at all. That's why I decided to place my bet on Oda Nobunaga."

"I see, that makes sense."

"Onii-sama, do you remember the Honnouji Incident?"

"Now that I think about it, I haven't visited any shrines or temples for the past two years. Maybe the memories of my death turned into mental trauma, making me avoid shrines and temples subconsciously..."

"That's what they call depth psychology, right!?"

While Hatsune and Masatsugu were discussing the new hypothesis, Shiori coughed on the side.

"Let us carefully examine this nonsense—no, bold hypothesis. Chances are 99% that the possibility of Masatsugu-sama being Lord Nobunaga is wrong."

"Oh?"

"Princess, 99% is going way overboard!"

"Lord Nobunaga was undoubtedly an excellent politician and strategist, but his abilities as a field commander are more inconclusive... Some accounts are rather suspect."

"But he won spectacular victories at Okehazama and Nagashino, right?"

While the knowledgeable princess recounted history, Hatsune tried to muster a small rebuttal.

"The depictions of battles in historical novels or dramas are almost all fake. The surprise attack on Okehazama that defeated Imagawa Yoshimoto and the three rows of gunfire that devastated the Takeda cavalry were all fiction conjured by novelists in the Edo period."

"R-Really?"

"There is a theory that Nobunaga was marching blindly in Okehazama when he chanced upon the enemy. In hindsight, the surprise attack was simply dumb luck."

"That doesn't sound cool~"

"Which is why it was 'embellished' to become an inspiring story of valor. Besides, Lord Nobunaga is often described as an innovative and progressive genius... But in fact, he was very concerned about public opinion. A man who stuck to steady and reliable methods. There are many surviving letters that he wrote to his retainers regarding such matters. He actually had quite a thoughtful personality."

"He's not the Devil of the Sixth Heaven!?"

"When Hideyoshi's legal wife was frustrated by her husband's infidelity, he even wrote letters to comfort her... Do you understand now? Masatsugu-sama isn't someone that thoughtful."

"That's definitely true!"

"Princess, Hatsune, jumping to conclusions is not a good thing."

Offended, Masatsugu objected to Hatsune's agreement with Shiori's assertion.

"I'm actually a man who knows how to be caring and considerate. Assuming the other person is a lady, I think."

"Right, you did mention you were some kind of skirt chaser in your past life, didn't you...?"

"Huh?"

Shiori grumbled with inexplicable consternation, causing Hatsune to react in shock.

"No way! Onii-sama—You're that kind of guy!?"

"What's so surprising about that? Every guy likes attractive women."

Masatsugu's attitude was blasé as always, completely unapologetic.

Hatsune smiled awkwardly. "I'm sorry, Onii-sama. You always looked so serious, that's why I found it surprising... Oh, Onii-sama, don't tell me I've caught your eye too?"

"Nope, I can swear to God and the High Heavens."

"Th-That's pretty rude too. I can't believe you rejected me so directly."

The Tachibana girl hung her head in dismay.

Masatsugu shrugged and said, "Don't worry, I'm talking about before. Since we're not blood related, but you're still willing to address me as your older brother, I suppose we're sworn siblings bound by destiny."

"Sworn... siblings?"

"Yeah, and I'm a guy who finds little sisters irresistible."

"Onii-sama, you shouldn't say that after delivering a touching speech!"

In the end, Hatsune easily got back into her usual stride.

Princess Shiori's immediate surroundings were still secure. However, a formidable foe was still eyeing the Suruga region. Furthermore, the Restoration Alliance had gained the exceptional carnivore known as Richard I.

Perhaps a dramatic change in the battle situation was around the corner.

Masatsugu had this sort of faint premonition.

Part 3

A helicopter took off from Nagoya Castle and finally arrived at the scene.

This was a special transport helicopter reserved for VIPs in the Tōkaidō Fiefdom with a capacity for seven passengers. The seats were made of real leather and the cabin's decor was very high class.

It was around 1pm.

Under the sunny sky, the noisy rotors could be heard throughout the flight.

"The tutelary fort at Higashimikawa is ablaze..." One of the passengers, a Chevalier in his late forties, said in shock.

"Higashimikawa" referred to the eastern part of the Aichi Prefecture in Tōkaidō. This tutelary fort was located in the mountains, right in the center between Toyohashi City and Gamagori City.

It was a star fort designed with a five-pointed arrangement of fortification walls.

Standing in the center, the nation-protecting keep and various buildings were all on fire.

There were over three hundred crimson Crusades in the air above the tutelary fort.

These Crusades had come from the Hamamatsu tutelary fort on the western edge of Shizuoka Prefecture. Using overwhelming numbers, the enemy had instantly crushed the garrison at Higashimikawa.

"It's a special variant that first appeared at the Fuji tutelary fort three days ago. According to Rikka's report, the enemy Chevalier is a Resurrectee who claims to be Richard I..."

The white-haired old man frowned with resentment in his voice.

His name and title were Akigase Shouzan, Governor General of Tōkaidō.

Akigase Shouzan was dressed in a kimono with an Inverness coat. Slender and crane-like in appearance, he was glaring sharply. A sixty-eight-year-old man who made a striking impression.

Chevalier Akigase Rikka was the eldest child born to him when he was late in his years.

"So the knights of the Restoration have finally encroached upon the land of Mikawa, huh?"

Imperial Japan's military used small and mid-size retainer beasts for reconnaissance.

Of course, Akigase Shouzan could depend on reports from pipe foxes or yatagarasus, but he still chose to confirm the situation for himself at the scene.

The reason was—

Over the past two days, another three tutelary forts in eastern Aichi had fallen.

"Yesterday was Okumikawa, this morning was Atsumi... And this afternoon was Higashimikawa. They are truly doing whatever they please."

In every case, the attacks were conducted by crimson Crusades.

They were the army led by Richard I, apparently called the Escalibors.

Through the helicopter's window, Akigase Shouzan glared at the giant figures of the red knights.

His stronghold of Nagoya was very near Kinai. Going west then crossing the Kiso River would reach Kinai Fiefdom—the land ruled by the Restoration Alliance's leader.

Recklessly mobilizing Nagoya's forces would lead Kinai to attack.

Akigase Shouzan and the Kinai provincial army were restraining each other across the Kiso River. Meanwhile, he requested reinforcements from various neighboring regions such as Tōsandō, Hokuriku, and Kantō. Negotiating between various factions, he sought to regroup and launch a counterattack.

However, the results were not promising.

Perhaps, their plan was to sacrifice Tōkaidō—

"What do you mean by halting the attack for now, Edward?"

"Proper preparations are needed before these conquered tutelary forts of Okumikawa, Atsumi, and Higashimikawa can be used as bases to stage an invasion against Nagoya. A mere half a day isn't enough to complete all requisite tasks, such as having nearby residents sign written pledges to obey the Charter of Chivalry."

A few hours had gone by after Higashimikawa's fall.

The sky was dark and Edward was in the castellan's office, receiving Richard who had returned to the Hamamatsu tutelary fort in triumph. It was for this purpose that he had specially made a trip from Hakone.

The two of them were sitting on separate sofas, facing each other across the reception table.

"A lightning offensive is a good thing, but Uncle, you are causing too much destruction."

"Hmm..."

"How about resting for a week? Come with me to Hakone during this period. It will be nice to enjoy the hot springs and the autumn scenery."

"Hmph." The ancestor with title of Lionheart frowned. "It was the same thing a few days ago. I was pursuing the enemy after my victory at Fuji, but you summoned me back before I could conquer Motosu..."

"There was no need to traverse Mount Fuji to enter Yamanashi territory, after all," Edward explained with a shrug, unfazed by the angry lion. "Even if you conquered the likes of Motosu and Kouhujou, the surrounding area is mountainous and treacherous. Movement of Legions over mountains of that sort, where powerful earth spirits reside, will incur severe consumption of ectoplasmic fluid, and there are no water shrines to use in the mountains."

Daihosatsu Ridge, Yatsugatake, Okuchichibu, Okutama, Tanzawa, and others...

Edward recalled vague impressions of these geographic names. The mountainous region between Tōkaidō and Kantō was vast with numerous peaks. He had long given up on memorizing all of them.

Rather than geographic names, strategic significance was more important.

"If you try to invade Tokyo by traversing the mountains, exhausting your army in the process... You will only play into the hands of the patiently waiting Kantō Fiefdom."

"That is why I wanted to march west now."

"Yes, Uncle, if you were to take care of the provincial capital of Nagoya and deal the mortal blow to the Tōkaidō Fiefdom while I undertake preparations at Hakone to invade Kantō—That would be the ideal development."

Nagoya was both the provincial capital and the beating heart of Tōkaidō.

The Aichi Prefecture centered around this metropolis was home to a population and production capacity far surpassing Shizuoka and Yamanashi combined.

Consequently, the Tōkaidō Fiefdom had maintained ample military readiness there.

The Aichi Prefecture had a total of ten tutelary forts of which six were concentrated in Nagoya's outskirts.

"There are fifteen Chevaliers stationed in this area along with the Tōkaidō Governor General overseeing everything. Although he is not a Chevalier, I heard he is rather shrewd and experienced."

Were he a Chevalier, they would have been able to recruit him *swiftly* as they did with the Kinai Governor General.

Edward recalled the magical powers of Eleanor who was still in Kyoto. On the other hand, Richard snorted and scowled with displeasure again.

Then immediately, he grinned mischievously.

"Let us be honest, Edward. What you want is to leave this inferior prey of Nagoya to me so that you can have Kantō—or rather, the Roman garrison there—all to yourself, am I right?"

"That is quite a nasty way of putting things," Edward made a wry smile elegantly without confirming or denying it. "Lord Caesar is currently not in Japan... But he is ultimately a great hero. Rumor has it that he has planted a number of schemes to protect Tokyo on behalf of the weak Kantō Fiefdom and the Imperial Guard. Even the Japanese side are kept in the dark."

"Oh?"

"To attack impulsively like a lion would only end up falling into a trap. I choose to attack Kantō only because I believe I am more suited to the task. Uncle, please understand."

"Very well, but I do have a condition." Richard went straight to the chase. "From what I hear, you had yourself quite a bloody good time at Fuji. There is a bunch of interesting Chevaliers at Suruga, valiantly resisting our armies, is that correct?"

"Oh dear, Uncle, so that is what you are getting at."

This fierce ancestor was definitely a short-sighted and impulsive man.

However, Richard's nose and various instincts were exceptionally keen. He must have smelled "delicious prey" this time without even

thinking deeply.

Furthermore, it was an exquisite dessert that Edward the Black Prince had specially saved for later.

"Fine, so be it. Uncle, I have *two* demands."

"Try me."

"The first one is very simple. Before setting off for Suruga, please conquer Nagoya first."

"What bloody rubbish is this? This hot blood of mine is about to erupt right away."

"The risks outweigh the benefits if you intentionally take a detour, only to fall into a trap. So far, the man lurking in Suruga... has yet to reveal the true extent of his powers. His hunting skills ought to be quite exceptional."

"On what grounds do you believe that?"

"A man who excels at escaping will likewise excel at trapping his enemy. In the past, I have faced a similar acquaintance."

Edward recalled his rival of old, a hero of France.

There was something about Tachibana Masatsugu that *smelled* similar to that man. Meanwhile, the Lionheart dismissed it with a fearless smile. Although deep thought was not his forte, he was a man of extraordinary ability.

"Then I shall attack seriously instead of savoring small bites."

"Apart from him, Suruga has other capable knights. It would be best to take caution."

"What about your second demand?"

"After conquering Suruga, please locate a beautiful princess with dazzling platinum hair. That girl could ostensibly become an interesting trump card. She has an air quite similar to Eleanor's. You

will certainly recognize her on sight, Uncle."

Edward recalled the noble lady whom Tachibana Masatsugu was serving in a knightly capacity.

Her name was Fujinomiya Shiori, the shunned princess of Imperial Japan in curious circumstances.

Part 4

October 31.

Half a month had elapsed since the Restoration Alliance's invasion of Shizuoka.

Early this morning, a messenger pipe fox sent by Nagoya arrived at the Suruga tutelary fort, bringing news that three tutelary forts in Tōkaidō had fallen yesterday and the day before.

"This means that Nagoya's situation is getting dire just like ours?"

"Compared to Suruga, which is left alone for now, it might be more dangerous in a certain sense."

Masatsugu was accompanying Hatsune to pay respects at a tomb.

It was 2pm or so. There were no other people at the cemetery apart from them. This peaceful cemetery was located at the Abe River on the west side of Suruga and near the home of "the real Tachibana Masatsugu."

"Onii-sama... Sorry for not visiting until now. The clan's duties and service to the princess will be undertaken properly by me and this Onii-sama here. Please rest in peace."

"That's a really complicated way of putting things," Masatsugu muttered while putting his palms together in front of the tomb together with Hatsune.

Before them was a tomb marker reading "Tomb of the Tachibana Clan." Next to it was a small stone tablet inscribed with the entombed's names.

The latest name was "Tachibana Masatsugu," preceded by Masatsugu's parents, then grandparents—

"When they buried *the real one*, they still carved his name on the stone... Fortunately, I only stole his identity but not his tombstone

as well."

This was probably a tiny bit of compensation secretly provided by Hatsune's father and elders in the clan when they took the name of the young Tachibana who had died prematurely to give to an unidentified Resurrectee.

Masatsugu only noticed this thoughtfulness when he saw the stone tablet today.

After praying for "the real one," Masatsugu said, "Hatsune, please accept my thanks and apologies to the real one. If possible, please stay behind me as much as possible when on the battlefield."

"Oh my, Onii-sama, you're going to protect me?"

Hatsune sounded slightly offended, as befitted a member of a clan of heroes who prided themselves on strength.

Masatsugu shook his head. "No, what I mean is... You should observe me carefully to learn how battles are fought. Until you become full-fledged, I am willing to do what I can."

"That's cool. However, I am a bit surprised."

"Surprised?"

"I thought you'd be more of a lone wolf in combat."

"A fresh recruit can't do everything on the battlefield and needs looking after in the first place. And the one to look after Tachibana Hatsune is precisely me, Tachibana Masatsugu, that's all."

Masatsugu shared his thoughts and came to realize something.

Judging from this, back in the past, did he also follow someone to learn about how battles were fought? Probably... Yes?

Following strong, fierce, and persevering men, he had rode to the ends of the earth on many occasions—

Just as he felt certain he had lived such a life...

"Oh my? It's an alarm!?"

Hatsune jumped in fright. An alarm was blaring through the public speakers all over Suruga City, accompanied by a broadcast message urging civilians to take refuge indoors.

With tacit acknowledgement, the two of them immediately left the cemetery.

Naturally, they were not going to take shelter. Tachibana Masatsugu and Hatsune were Chevaliers defending this city.

"Onii-sama, let's hurry to the tutelary fort!"

"Hmm?"

At the cemetery parking lot, Hatsune hurried Masatsugu, but he noticed something was off.

Something was flying at high speed from south of Suruga Bay, heading straight to the center of town near the train station. A normal person's eyesight would probably mistake it for an airplane.

"A red Crusade... It's King Richard's Legion!"

They had seen this type of Crusade three days ago, but for some reason, there was only *a single* one flying.

Unlike the capital's city center, Suruga did not have many tall buildings. Hence, Masatsugu's excellent eyesight was able to see the red Crusade from the cemetery in the suburbs.

Another shadow in the sky also concerned him.

A wyvern was flying in front, leading the Crusade.

Masatsugu could clearly see a Chevalier riding on the wyvern.

Part 5

The scene changed to the imperial capital of Tokyo.

The residence of the Empress of Imperial Japan was called the "imperial palace."

Even though it was known as a castle, it was actually completely different from Japanese castles such as Nijou Castle.

Entirely in the style of a European palace, it had been built in Tokyo's Aoyama neighborhood after the Second World War. Constructed with bricks and a steel frame in an imitation of Baroque architecture, the palace was sturdy and beautiful.

The magnificent palace used a large quantity of white bricks, resulting in a stylish exterior.

Somewhere in the imperial palace was a waiting room used exclusively by military officers visiting from the Eastern Roman Empire.

There were all sorts of extravagant furnishings in the room. Most important of all, the room was equipped with a direct telephone line to Roman military facilities outside of Japan.

Currently, Alexis Yang was in the middle of using this direct line.

"No sense of crisis... That would not be a correct description."

Yang was holding the receiver in one hand, speaking in a laid back tone of voice.

He was dressed in the Eastern Roman Empire's military uniform, which was colored blue and featured a blazer-style jacket. The top two buttons of his shirt collar were unfastened and he was not wearing a tie either.

Yang had facial hair on his chin, giving him a wild look that suited his sloppy attire.

"They realize this situation needs to be handled, but have no idea what to do, which is why they procrastinate without accomplishing anything... That pretty much covers the reactions of anyone who matters in the imperial palace."

These scathing words were delivered lightly without any tone of sarcasm.

Yang was a major serving as part of the "Eastern Roman Empire's East Asian Administrative Region Military Staff." The man he was speaking to was not only the most famous person in the world but also the great hero who had founded the Empire.

'Nothing out of the ordinary. The Empress is surrounded by useless ladies-in-waiting.'

The speaker's voice was regal and majestic without sounding pretentious.

This unique diction belonged to Generalissimo Caesar of Rome.

Yang replied, "Those hags—correction, older ladies—only know how to put on airs and bully members of the same sex."

'I really wish the Imperial Guard or the Kantō Fiefdom could show a little competence.'

"Yes, I will check things out later."

Styling himself as Imperial Japan's *patronus*, Caesar was currently absent from Japan.

A month ago, Rome and the British Empire had clashed at the island of Java. Standing by at Lantau Island in Hong Kong, Caesar had sent Staff Officer Yang to Tokyo on his behalf.

Yang was a noetic master, capable of speaking freely without fear of eavesdropping.

Techniques for sensing electromagnetic radiation and noetic waves allowed one to confirm the risk of being eavesdropped. Invoking noetic waves to cause interference would also counter every type of

surveillance equipment.

"By the way, that princess whom you fancy so much—Her Highness Shiori—has been abandoned, clearly left to die without any rescue attempt... It would be scandalous if this rumor leaked out, but in any case, someone will use this opportunity to make her disappear."

'Oh? That is not very good.'

"If the British were to capture a princess of noble blood, there could spell all sorts of trouble. Japan's awareness of this is far too lax."

'How regrettable. By the way, Major Yang, regarding your new mission...'

"...A new mission?"

"The situation has changed over the past few days, hasn't it? I have devised a few countermeasures after being notified. First of all—Please infiltrate Suruga where Shiori is right now. Visit the tutelary fort that has been fighting bravely in isolation and present yourself as a military adviser.'

"...Hold on a sec. I promised my daughter I'm returning home in a week."

Yang accidentally committed a soldier's taboo of defying an order. He was already thirty-four and had a single eleven-year-old daughter in Hong Kong.

"I already bought souvenirs in Japan, like idol concert videos and a rice cooker."

'Just have them sent via air mail. I will have the staff section inform your wife.'

"She's my ex, not my wife, okay! Besides, isn't infiltration the job of the intelligence department? Those guys must have sneaked into Suruga already, right?"

The great historical hero must be snickering to himself on the other side. Alexis Yang was certain of it and tried to argue.

Caesar laughed maliciously and said, 'Your job is to make adjustments to our side's military strategy based on my wishes and local circumstances. Both the commander at Suruga and I need someone to perform this role.'

"Fine, fine. In other words, Your Excellency will not just send troops from Kantō to take back Hakone."

Yang stopped joking around and switched to a sulking tone of voice.

"You intend to negotiate with Suruga to launch an attack from west of Hakone for a pincer offensive, right? I will work hard as though my salary and pension depended on it. Currently, what Japan needs most is undoubtedly Your Excellency... Generalissimo Caesar."

'That goes without saying. Since I do wish for matters over here to be handled well, I will make adjustments.'

Even through the telephone, Caesar's voice still sounded full of vibrancy.

In any case, someone had received orders from Eastern Rome's Generalissimo and was preparing to head to Tōkaidō.

Chapter 5 - Battle between Lion and Hound (1)

Part 1

15:27, October 31st.

This was the moment when Richard the Lionheart arrived in Suruga City.

Riding his white wyvern, he slowly descended with a crimson British "Escalibor" Legion by his side. The Legion landed with a heavy thud.

The location was in front of Suruga Station.

The high-speed rail terminal was huge and the area in front of the station was also very prosperous.

There were department stores and grand buildings in the style of office districts. It was rare for a quiet regional city to have such a "metropolitan" area.

The wyvern and the Escalibor had suddenly appeared at the bus terminal here.

Soon after the alarm sounded in the city, the ancient King of England and his Legion invaded Suruga City swiftly, flying like a shooting star.

...There were still civilians around the station who had not escaped in time.

Roughly a hundred and fifty people. The red giant raised its bayonet rifle and fired.

Rather than the civilians, the rifle was aimed up at the white clouds in the blue sky. The scorching beam tore through the sky, accompanied by a thunderous noise of gunfire.

Nearby crowds were all fixated on the red Legion and the wyvern's rider.

"People of Suruga, I am a Chevalier of the British Empire as well as a King of England in the past, Richard the Lionheart. Be at ease and raise your heads."

The English king's Legions, the Escalibors, stood over eight meters tall.

Richard's wyvern was hovering near the red giant's shoulder. Overlooking the scenery in front of the station, Richard nodded with satisfaction.

This Resurrectee's voice was not very coarse. Instead, he sounded magnanimous.

A sonorous and beautiful voice, it was clear and deep.

"Hohohoho. There is no need to scurry away like rats, people of this city. I did not come today to fight. I am here as a knight to inform the people of Suruga who have been fighting valiantly."

The Escalibor behind Richard emitted the same voice and words from behind its mask. More precisely, it was not a voice but sound formed from noetic waves.

Hence, that was why the *sound* was spreading like a wave.

The volume itself was not too great, yet every resident within a radius of several kilometers could hear it clearly.

"Now then... It pains my heart to hear of your harrowing plight. The Chevaliers of Suruga have fought bravely against us of the Restoration Alliance, but the result is that across the land of Shizuoka, this is the last city that has yet to come under the British Empire's protection. Listen to me, people of this city!"

Riding his wyvern, Richard advanced slowly along the main road in front of the station.

He was flying at an altitude around three floors high. Advancing in leisure, it was almost like a parade of triumph.

The Escalibor was also hovering in the air, following its master.

"Who are the ones who suffer in war!? Isn't it you, the people of the city? So long as the knights of Suruga continue to resist, you will be imprisoned in this city, unable to satisfy your stomachs, enduring hunger, fear, and uncertainty. I sympathize with your plight from the bottom of my heart!"

Richard looked down upon the streets haughtily while delivering a passionate speech.

The Lionheart's voice included elements of rapture. It seemed like he was very moved by his own speech.

"I hereby promise you that I shall be the one to liberate you. I shall conquer Suruga without fail and guide all of you to come under the British Empire's protection. When the time comes, I shall send a gift of ten thousand casks of wine to hold a glorious celebration lasting three days and three nights. I welcome all of you to join me in sharing this fine wine of victory!"

Richard raised his fist up high, adding to the climax of the speech.

At that moment, he suddenly lowered his voice and said, "However, I do beg for your understanding regarding one matter. Next, I shall be resting for five days, and once I am rested, the first target to fall to me shall be Nagoya. It is Nagoya where I shall bring an end to the Tōkaidō Fiefdom."

There was a layer of gloom on the passionate Lionheart's expression.

With a face of anguish that befitted a tragic protagonist, he raised his arms and shouted to the people, "Please bear this in mind. I shall conquer Nagoya within ten days then return to Suruga the next day to liberate you. In the mean time, please wait patiently for my second coming. See you again!"

After saying everything he wanted, Richard gently kicked his wyvern's side.

The wyvern flapped its wings and flew east, towards Fuji City. The Escalibor followed.

The crimson British Legion was holding a wooden bucket in its left hand.

While flying, the Legion opened the bucket's lid, dropping thousands of pieces of paper.

The huge amount of paper was scattered all over Suruga City by the wind.

...This was the beginning of "The Attack of Richard I." The crowds at the scene watched in mesmerization, completely forgetting to escape.

In fact, there was a Chevalier on standby near the scene.

"What on earth is that man thinking?"

The four-wheel-drive military vehicle stopped its engine on the road in front of the station.

Castellan Akigase Rikka frowned from the back seat.

The genie at the Suruga tutelary fort, Sakuya, had issued a warning—A single Escalibor was approaching Suruga at high speed. Rikka rushed out as a result.

This was to allow her to destroy the enemy instantly if they engaged in destructive activities violating the Charter of Chivalry.

However, what she ran into was an unexpected speech.

"To be honest... I am not really concerned about the repercussions of that speech," Rikka said solemnly.

It was the next day after Richard I visited Suruga to deliver a speech.

"After all, he promised to rescue the people of the city then talked about resting before attacking Nagoya. Totally disorganized."

November 1st. On this day, Masatsugu excused himself from school

and came to a conference room at the Suruga tutelary fort.

Rikka had invited him to join a war council.

"Since he is a reborn hero and a *legatus legionis* surpassing ordinary Chevaliers, I am reluctant to say anything too harsh—"

After using a term used to honor Resurrectees...

She said it outright.

"I suspect him of being a complete idiot."

"R-Rikka-sama, you are being too direct," said Hatsune, somewhat troubled, who was at the table.

The three Chevaliers, Habuna, Maike, and Tabi, also smiled awkwardly. This war council had gathered all Chevaliers in Suruga to discuss their next step.

Furthermore, the ancient English king's speech had been under yatagarasu surveillance.

Masatsugu and the others had watched the video after noetic processing.

"However, I dare not call him an idiot now. After reading the flyers distributed by Richard I at the end, some of the residents are wavering. Some have even proposed 'it might be better to just lose to the Restoration Alliance'," Rikka analyzed the situation.

Masatsugu was reminded of the flyer's contents.

It stated the facts that Shizuoka Prefecture and Nagoya were about to fall to the Restoration Alliance. Its concluding sentence was the prediction that 'soon, the people of Suruga will come under the protection of the Lionheart of England'...

"Sigh, this cannot be helped either. It is true that we of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom are unable to provide sufficient food to the people of the city. The battle situation is clearly tipped against us."

Rikka admitted candidly and shrugged.

"There is no problem at the moment, but riots might start eventually."

"This Richard I—"

The most noble attendee at this conference suddenly spoke.

All eyes focused on one person, Princess Fujinomiya Shiori of Imperial Japan, who continued, "Undeniably, he is a man who lives life very impulsively. As a fierce knight, he also has an artistic side to him with a love for poetry... Perhaps due to this, he often acts capriciously, changing his mind on whim."

Neither a warrior nor a high-ranking officer, Shiori was also attending this war council.

This was the first step in the shunned princess' "ascension."

The two Chevaliers, Tachibana Masatsugu and Hatsune, were in her personal service, making her currently the Suruga tutelary fort's "most important ally." Furthermore, the princess had already demonstrated her outstanding mystic abilities and insight to these people present. As a result...

'May I attend this war council?'

When Shiori asked tactfully, Rikka did not refuse.

The three young men Chevaliers at the table and the military officers of the tutelary fort also respectfully accepted her.

Having obtained respect befitting her status and ability, the imperial princess explained in a wise tone of voice as always.

"As soon as the militant Richard I was crowned the King of England, he sold off many things to raise funds for war. This included precious possessions, national treasures, castles, territories, noble titles, and townships."

"How could a ruler of a nation act so irresponsibly?" Rikka was

aghast.

Shiori nodded and continued, "Yes. Dismissing local officials then forcing them to buy back their posts was a trick that he frequently used. It was said that he almost sold away the capital of London."

"What an irresponsible man..."

"He probably felt no attachment to England. The royal family ruling medieval England were originally nobles from France who crossed the sea to conquer the island of Great Britain."

Masatsugu was very surprised to hear the name of France.

"Richard I's Plantagenet family was high nobility in France, holding lands including the Duchy of Aquitaine, the County of Anjou, and the Duchy of Normandy. England itself was simply one of the Plantagenet dynasty's territories."

The well-learned Shiori spoke fluently.

"The Plantagenets essentially made their residence in France, living as French nobles, only visiting Great Britain when it was necessary for them to wear the identity of 'the English royal family of the Plantagenet dynasty. They almost always used French and never spoke English."

The names of Richard and Edward should be pronounced in French as "Ree-shaar" and "Ay-doo-waar"...

When Shiori added this last bit of trivia, Hatsune remarked poignantly, "It's like running a side business while having a day job."

"A very apt description. Indeed, the Plantagenet family was a great landowner that even surpassed the King of France himself. France was their true stronghold while the King of England was just a part-time job. But after the death of Richard I, his younger brother John Lackland's failures led to losing virtually all of their holdings on the European continent, forcing them to flee to England."

Masatsugu remembered. He had heard an anecdote during history

class.

Losing his territory was what earned King John the nickname of "Landless."

"These problems erupted during the generation of Black Prince Edward's father, resulting in the Hundred Years War between England and France. In truth, the two royal families at the time were relatives..."

"I see, so that is the personality of King Richard." Rikka sighed.

"Now the problem is... This tyrant was very good at war, personality aside—or rather, that type of personality is probably a factor contributing to his peerless ferocity. Easily employing methods that normal people would not dare to use, he achieved victories through flashy ostentatious shows of brute force."

The Tōkaidō Fiefdom's Chevalier princess said gloomily, "The next time Richard comes to Suruga will be after he has conquered Nagoya, right? Naturally, I have informed my father of his declaration... But will Nagoya be able to hold—The situation is not optimistic."

"Rikka-sama, there are additional points of worry," Shiori shared her views again. "Once Nagoya falls and Tōkaidō is officially extinct, the Restoration Alliance will then have free rein to deploy all Chevaliers to attack Suruga. Confronted with Richard I and multiple Knights of Her Majesty—We will face inevitable defeat."

"Yes, in which case our only options are to retreat or to surrender."

Rikka fell silent, arms crossed before her chest. She was pondering their course of action.

Five minutes later, she still had not said a word, probably because she could not come up with any good ideas. The three young men Chevaliers, Hatsune, and Shiori also had nothing to say.

Under this grave atmosphere, Masatsugu spoke up, "Sure enough, Prince Edward is the impressive one here."

"Onii-sama, our discussion here is about Richard."

"I know, but the reason why that hot-blooded idiot is a nuisance is mainly because Prince Edward's chain is firmly attached to his collar."

"What do you mean?" Hatsune was puzzled.

Masatsugu calmly explained, "Think about it carefully. Why did Richard go out of his way to deliver a speech in Suruga?"

"Uhh... On a whim?"

"Possibly, but according to Her Highness, he is impulsive to the point of irresponsible... A man like that cannot be expected to exercise restraint, right? In fact, I felt he would take the speech as a chance to launch a surprise assault. Especially since he views Suruga as 'special prey,' all the more reason he should do that."

The lion was not the only one who knew how to hunt—

Currently, Masatsugu was also taking a *hunter's* perspective to analyze and examine the habits and tendencies of the Lionhearted beast, so as to draw his conclusion.

"Someone persuaded Richard to hold back and he is very unhappy about this. Very frustrated. Hence, that was why he flew all the way to Suruga to deliver a glamorous speech, to vent his displeasure."

Masatsugu shrugged slightly and said, "What a shame. If Richard were to attack Suruga in full force... It would be the best opportunity to defeat him."

"Ehhhh!? No way, that guy's Chevalier Strength is over a thousand, you know!?"

Hatsune was very shocked. No, everyone attending this war council felt the same. On behalf of the group, the Tachibana girl questioned Masatsugu, "Also, his Feat of Arms is powerful, and he is talented at commanding Legions..."

"This simply involves a question of comparison. Richard attacking

alone versus facing a large group of Chevaliers in a fierce offensive after Nagoya falls—Which do you think is easier to defeat?"

"Of course facing Richard alone. But even by himself, he's quite formidable, right?"

"On that point... It seems that I'm very good at handling opponents like him."

The little sister warned Masatsugu, prompting him to mutter.

Without raising his voice deliberately, his quiet words conveyed clear confidence.

"Against a man like him, I know a number of effective traps."

"Really, Onii-sama!?" Hatsune leaned forward, her eyes glimmering brightly.

"Th-Then why don't we take the initiative to attack!?"

"That would be difficult. The troops I can currently use won't exceed two or three hundred. If I had to rely on such numbers to engage him... I need to lure him into attacking Suruga aggressively."

Masatsugu shook his head.

"Otherwise, there is no way to lead him into a trap in a natural manner."

Perhaps the Black Prince had also considered the risk of a "hunting trap," which was why he persuaded the lion to "wait."

Edward was truly remarkable. Not only did he skillfully command troops on the battlefield but he also had the capability to control a subordinate who was like a savage beast.

Masatsugu was catching a faint glimpse of the Black Prince's prowess. A formidable foe surpassing Richard.

"We need bait. And this bait needs to lure the impulsive Richard to Suruga before the British forces attack Nagoya. Otherwise, both

Suruga and Nagoya will be crushed."

"In that case... I have an idea."

The one who offered—was precisely Shiori.

"This is a dangerous gamble. But since our defeat is sealed unless we go all-in and take the plunge, let us put on an extravagant show of fireworks to attract that man's attention."

With the gazes of every knight focused upon her, Shiori explained her plan methodically.

Her dignified tone of voice was as though she were a nation's leader or military adviser.

Part 2

In the early hours of October 2nd, at the darkest moment just before dawn...

Fire broke out in Suruga City, the north part of town, near the foot of Mount Ryuusou of the Southern Alps.

This included a central wholesale market and the warehouses of many logistics companies.

The fire started in this neighborhood.

The blaze spread instantly, burning down a number of warehouses.

After firefighting efforts, the warehouses were almost completely wrecked, leaving only steel frames.

The greatest loss was the food stored in these warehouses.

Due to the blockade, ordinary shops had run out of fresh food such as vegetables, meat, and fish a long time ago.

However, non-perishable food such as rice, wheat flour, potatoes, carrots, tubers, and canned food had been requisitioned by the Suruga municipal government beforehand to be managed and distributed to the masses through rationing.

Unfortunately—

The incinerated warehouses were storing ration supplies.

Since vast quantities of food were needed to feed Suruga, transporting it was laborious and time-consuming, which was why the food was stored directly at logistics hubs.

As part of the management system, infantry from the tutelary fort were stationed in the surroundings for security.

However, someone had slipped through the security net and

committed arson against what was the Suruga residents' life line.

"Well, supplies are kept all over the city. It's not like that was the only location."

Okonogi Taisei said in a voice lacking in energy.

Masatsugu's best friend was talking to him, staring at the stories in the newspaper.

"The report said... the incinerated food amounted to slightly less than 40% of supplies. This is a very serious situation."

"Suruga cannot rely on relief supplies from outside, after all," Masatsugu agreed with his friend's lament.

"The Restoration Alliance has secured naval superiority in Suruga Bay, blocking sea routes. The railway has stopped running while roads are sealed off. Unless we find a solution soon, surrender is the only option."

"What an ordeal, seriously."

Two days after the fire, the two of them were near Suruga Station.

This was where Richard I had visited three days earlier. After school, Taisei mentioned he wanted to go there and Masatsugu volunteered to accompany him.

Their destination was the Suruga branch office of Tōkaidō News.

Serving as student council vice-president, Taisei also worked part-time at the Suruga branch office of Tōkaidō News.

Today, he was here to read the newspaper that was in limited circulation rather than coming in for work. To save on paper, ink, and other supplies, normal newspapers were not being published currently. But once every few days, a hundred copies were distributed among community centers and libraries for people to read.

Taisei had pleaded with the receptionist and picked up a copy of the newspaper to browse casually.

"If this 'internet' invented by the Americans becomes widespread, we'll be able to read news from our computers at home."

"What is that?"

"I'm not sure of the details, but simply stated... It seems to augment a computer's communication functionality, an information network that links up the whole world. But like the telephone, it's easily affected by noetic disruption, which is why progress has been slow."

"Sounds like something very complicated."

"There are rumors that militaries have constructed similar network systems using noetics."

After reading the newspaper, the two of them left the newspaper office.

Their mode of locomotion was the healthy bicycle. They decided to take a stroll in front of the station instead of heading to the parking lot directly.

"By the way, Masatsugu-kun. If you're not too busy with your knight duties, how about working as a volunteer? Tomorrow morning, the boys at our school are going to the fisherman's association to help bring in nets and catch fish. We'll be rewarded directly with some of the catch. After that, we'll organize a sea fishing tournament that's open to anyone interested. The intention is to catch more fish like girellas or horse mackerels and improve Suruga's food situation."

"The filefish is currently in season. Catching them is pretty fun."

"Also, I'd like to use the gardening club's contacts to help out the farmer's association in exchange for fruit and vegetables."

Their enthusiasm for volunteer work with impure motives was boundless.

Meanwhile, there were substantial crowds in the streets today, a

rather rare sight lately. The reason was evidently the "event" that had been held in front of the station.

Men and women, young and old, all kinds of residents.

There were roughly thirty or forty people, even housewives bringing children.

They were passing out flyers to pedestrians in front of the station, hollering "the Suruga tutelary fort needs to hurry and make a decision, to join the Restoration Alliance!" "We don't want to keep suffering due to war!" "Please give the children enough food!"

They called for signatures for a petition demanding the Suruga tutelary fort's surrender to the Restoration Alliance.

"For the past half a month... Ever since Suruga's blockade, people have been secretly carrying out such activities from time to time."

Watching the disruptive proceedings in disdain, Taisei sighed helplessly.

"It has gotten worse these few days. The city's residents seem to be accepting them with a more favorable view."

People were frequently accepting the flyers from the activists' hands.

People who ignored them turned out to be the minority instead. Some people even gave their signature at the table prepared by the organizers.

"The food burning incident happened recently, so people can't help but feel afraid."

"That was very likely to be arson, right? Rumor has it that the culprits are spies of the Restoration Alliance—"

"That's hard to say. The Restoration Alliance currently wants to leave Suruga alone."

"In that case... Another rumor says those guys are responsible."

Taisei threw a furtive glance at the participants in the "petition signing."

"If the food situation worsens, weighing to decide the lesser of two evils, more and more people will support surrendering. This is their objective—That's what some people say."

"There's no proof, but it's very compelling."

"Right, Masatsugu-kun, aren't you going to suppress these kinds of activities?"

"That's not my job. Besides, similar activities are happening all over the place. Dispersing just this lot isn't meaningful."

"True. Say, it's hard to imagine you saying something so reasonable, Masatsugu-kun, when half a month ago, you were still fixated on the beauty contest."

Taisei nodded and remarked poignantly.

"Nowadays, you really act like a Chevalier. I'm so touched."

"I haven't forgotten the beauty contest, it's just that I currently can't focus on organizing it, which is why you mistakenly thought I'm neglecting it... In truth, I haven't given up on holding the beauty contest in December."

"Uh, I'm pretty sure no one's gonna object even if you give up on it."

Rinzai High's school festival was scheduled to be held in early December.

One of the events was a beauty contest. After expressing his determination as the executive committee member in charge of the contest, Masatsugu changed the subject.

"Let's put that aside. In truth, I actually need to ask you for a favor today."

"Is it related to the beauty contest?"

"Unfortunately, it's not a fun request."

Masatsugu took out a map of Suruga from his schoolbag.

A few circles had been drawn on it, all indicating warehouses involved in logistics. They were where food was kept for rations.

"Please gather twenty to thirty students in the name of the student council and set these marked locations on fire. After that, they will be arrested by either the military or the police and detained for a few days—That's the kind of volunteer I need. Use boarders, otherwise explaining to family will be a hassle."

"Huh?"

His best friend, the student council vice-president, tilted his head, stupefied.

Part 3

Richard's visit to Suruga had taken place on the last day of October.

It was November 6 today. Over this period, the Lionheart had fully re-energized, prepared to face the next battle.

Tomorrow—He was going to attack Tōkaidō's provincial capital.

Richard was scheduled to set off tomorrow afternoon in a grand departure, heading east to take Nagoya.

The first target was Okazaki Castle, a Japanese castle in Nishimikawa and the birthplace of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, featuring ancient Japanese architecture with a central keep and stone walls.

However, like Nijou Castle, its interior had been remodeled.

With Chevaliers and an ifrit stationed, the castle also functioned as a tutelary fort.

After taking Okazaki Castle, only then would one reach the outskirts of Nagoya City. Then penetrating the defensive net formed by the various tutelary forts including Kariya Castle and Kiyosu Castle, one would then march into Nagoya Castle—

Meanwhile, Kinai was also sending Restoration Alliance knights to attack from the west.

The Anglo-Japanese coalition forces consisted of the "crimson knights," a thousand Escalibors advancing from the east, and the "blue samurai" Kamuys advancing from the west in a simultaneous attack on the prey known as "Nagoya."

From the east were the "crimson knights," a thousand Escalibors. From the west were the "blue samurai,"

"What a spectacular scene."

Richard muttered to himself in ecstasy.

However, there was a matter that pained the merciful and compassionate lion king's heart.

...As a Chevalier, collecting intelligence from various places was exceedingly easy. Since Suruga was the prey that Richard would enjoy last, he had informed the intelligence department in advance that he was to be notified of any movements in Suruga immediately.

Hence, Richard learned of a certain piece of news.

"Who would have thought that the people of Suruga desire me so much..."

Recently, Richard had gone to Suruga City to deliver a passionate speech, venting the frustration in his heart.

Apparently, the passionate performance had moved the people's hearts. The city was beginning to look forward to signs of the Lionheart's arrival.

'The Suruga tutelary fort should surrender to the Restoration Alliance as soon as possible.'

Civilians demanding Suruga officials to surrender were setting food warehouses on fire one after another.

Their goal was to protest against the Suruga tutelary fort's futile resistance.

At first, a fire broke out at one place, but the crimes had spread these few days. Another four warehouses had been torched.

The Suruga police was investigating desperately and had apprehended some arson suspects.

...The suspects were all students. Since they were minors, neither their names nor their school affiliations were released.

The next day after they had successfully burned down the second

warehouse, the Suruga branch of Tōkaidō News received an anonymous criminal manifesto.

The manifesto was published in the temporary newspaper in the form of a special report.

Spies lurking in Suruga City had copied the contents and transmitted it to the intelligence department. Richard had read it too. There was a sincere declaration that 'Suruga City's future lies with the Restoration Alliance and Chevalier Richard.'

After reading the eloquent and passionate manifesto, Richard was greatly moved.

However, the Suruga tutelary fort's reaction was stupid beyond belief. They suspected these students of 'secretly colluding with the Restoration Alliance to commit the crime of arson'—

The Suruga tutelary fort had handed over official protest letters to the various British forces stationed across Shizuoka.

Their main message was that this intentional destruction of civilian facilities was disgraceful behavior contravening the Charter of Chivalry.

Naturally, the British armed forces denied solemnly. The Suruga tutelary fort refused to be convinced and even declared that they were going to conduct further investigations.

They were planning to interrogate the student arsonists to get at the truth.

"I hope these youngsters will not be subjected to torture... No, one cannot expect much from the foolish and unscrupulous Suruga knights. I truly pity these students."

As an extremely chivalrous knight, Richard's heart was very pained.

Well, putting aside the heavy taxation and tough laws he had imposed upon the people under his rule... After all, the domains and the people living in them were his possessions.

Knights, nobles, and martyrs admiring the Lionheart were different.

"I must find a way to save them personally."

After that, Richard's thoughts began to accelerate in a certain direction.

He was very talented at letting his imagination roam free, to find justification for what he wanted to do. In the process, he would set his heart ablaze by igniting sparks of passion, thus drawing the conclusion he wanted—

"Upon my honor as a knight, I must rescue those students as quickly as possible. This is a matter of life and death."

As a side note...

Richard was currently not wearing his British military officer's uniform.

He was wearing a set of khaki combat attire—in other words, he had disguised himself as a common soldier. In fact, since a long time ago, he had always enjoyed traveling "incognito."

He often disguised himself as a pilgrim or a nameless knight to go traveling.

Right now, he had sneaked into a transport vessel sailing in Suruga Bay for a sea journey.

"Kukukuku. By this point, it is as though all preparations are complete."

The ship was about to enter the port of Tagonoura.

This was the port of Fuji City, the same city the Fuji tutelary fort, which is also the closest tutelary fort to Suruga—

It was currently 15:30 on November 6th.

Richard's plan was to establish a tutelary pact at Fuji's water shrine to make it his stronghold.

He was going to mobilize all of his Chevalier Strength to summon Escalibors to take Suruga. According to his reasoning, he could succeed in one go before the scheduled attack on Nagoya tomorrow.

"Those people sent by Edward to monitor me... Such naivete. Do they really believe that the Lionheart would wait obediently when there is still half a day before the next battle?"

Richard had noticed surveillants in his surroundings recently.

Pretending to be a napping lion, he had been looking for a chance to get these people off his trail.

Masatsugu's usual residence was the boys dorm of Rinzai High.

After becoming a Chevalier, he continued to live in his single room at the dorm.

However, he visited the princess' personal dorm every day and often had his meals there too. Still, it was the residence of Princess Shiori and her lady-in-waiting Hatsune, a ladies' domain, after all.

Normally, he left at 9pm to return to the boys dorm.

"It's time."

On the night of November 6th, around 11pm, Masatsugu left his dorm room.

Dressed in his student uniform, he walked confidently out of the boys dorm and came to the Black Lily Dorm where the princess lived. The two dorms were situated in the same area.

This dorm was a western mansion rich in Rokumeikan style.

Using a key only held by a select few, Masatsugu unlocked the entrance and tiptoed into the dorm.

He was very careful to avoid being seen by others. Finally, he arrived in front of a certain room on the second floor. The door to this room was not locked.

Turning the handle, Masatsugu swiftly entered the room.

"Excuse me."

"I have been waiting for you, Masatsugu-sama."

This was the princess' bedroom.

The room's decor and furniture were simple and elegant without any air of excess.

The well-learned Shiori loved to read but there were no bookshelves in her bedroom. She kept the vast majority of her books in the reading lounge. Consequently, her room was very clean and tidy without the mountains of books that often plagued bibliophiles.

"Hatsune did not see you... right?"

"Don't worry. I don't make mistakes."

It was just before bedtime and the princess was dressed rather casually.

She had untied her usual ponytail to let down her platinum blonde hair and was dressed in just a white yukata.

The two of them were alone in a girl's bedroom in the middle of the night. Furthermore, the other party was a princess of Imperial Japan.

If they were to be discovered, Masatsugu would be condemned in all kinds of ways. However, their secret late night meetings had already gone on for many days.

Indeed, it had started the day they set up bait to lure the Lionheart into their trap.

"It is almost time for Richard to set off for Nagoya."

"Yes, probably tomorrow or the day after."

"However, there is still no news of him coming to Suruga."

Shiori sighed in disappointment.

"We burned our own warehouses in the city and handed protest letters to the British forces, claiming 'the Restoration Alliance recruited youngsters to commit crimes.' We caused a highly controversial case of serial arson with the perpetrators being young male students who went out of control..."

The Rinzai High student culprits were currently detained at the Suruga tutelary fort.

Masatsugu and his group had prepared an 'arrested student organization' in advance to deceive the British spies lurking in the city. Naturally, these students were being hosted as honored guests inside the tutelary fort.

In addition, the fake arson case had only burned a small fraction of food.

The vast majority had been transported away before the fires and remained intact.

"We have prepared all kinds of factors to appeal to the Lionheart's preferences... But unfortunately, we seem to have failed."

The princess who had devised the plan shrugged helplessly.

Masatsugu asked, "Using students on purpose was part of the plan too?"

"Yes, indeed. It is said that the Lionheart was especially kind to young males. There are even some who suspect him of being homo... homosexual."

"Oh?"

More than this unexpected information, Masatsugu was more interested in Shiori herself while she was talking about the Lionheart's sexual preferences.

Her embarrassed look was truly adorable. In any case, the princess continued, "The British ignored our protests, which was expected.

And to think I really anticipated Richard to fall for it, but in the end, our efforts were for naught."

"It is still early to say. A man prone to indulging in narcissism like him usually lacks self-control," said Masatsugu quietly.

"The chance of any single trap catching him is definitely not low."

"I would hope so."

"By the way, Princess, it's time we begin tonight."

"I-I understand. Even if the plan fails, it is best to be prepared as a precaution."

Hearing her knight's request, the lady agreed shyly.

She was sitting on her personal bed. Masatsugu took a seat beside her. They were very close together, almost touching.

"So this strategem was inspired by the method I mentioned last time, with a modern spin applied to it?"

"Yes... You are correct. Torturing hostages in front of a castle to taunt angry enemies into rushing out to fight. My guess was that such a method might prove effective against someone like Richard..."

Shiori's voice instantly turned very quiet, because Masatsugu had held her hand.

"Princess."

"P-Please proceed... You may start."

After after repeating the same act over consecutive nights, Shiori was still very nervous.

Her innocent reaction was very endearing. Holding Shiori's hand, Masatsugu pushed her down onto the soft bed, covering her with his body.

"Masatsugu-sama..."

"Still not used to it?"

"No... It is very embarrassing for me. A-And this is my own room—
A man and a woman of our age, alone in a room, so lightly dressed,
I really..."

Normally eloquent, Shiori was stuttering.

The warmth of the blood coursing through the princess' noble body was the essence of ectoplasmic fluid. To enable Masatsugu to steal ectoplasmic fluid more efficiently, Shiori was wearing just a light yukata on purpose.

Ever since the day of the war council, they had been doing the same thing every night.

This was the reason.

"Sorry, it's my fault for imposing a burden on your health, Princess."

"Pay no mind to it. As your liege, it is only right for me to go through hardship in order to assist my knight—to assist the one who is laying his life on the line for my sake."

For the past half a month, Masatsugu had been obtaining ectoplasmic fluid from Shiori.

However, this ultimately was an act of extracting "something" from blood, the source of life. For the past few days, Shiori had experienced frequent dizzy spells.

Furthermore, her physical strength had clearly declined, causing her to be out of breath especially easily.

Even so, she still insisted on their *secret meetings* to give her ectoplasmic fluid to Masatsugu.

"M-Masatsugu-sama, please do not keep staring at me..."

"That would be a tall order, Princess. Right now, you are too

beautiful."

"Goodness gracious... Here you go again."

Masatsugu was carefully examining the princess pinned under him.

In contrast, Shiori did not dare look Masatsugu in the eye. With her head turned away shyly, she looked so cute and alluring.

When he pushed her down on the bed, the collar of Shiori's yukata had almost opened up.

The princess' willfully maturing bust had almost popped out. The sheltered princess endured her embarrassment and bravely accepted Masatsugu's embrace.

"Masatsugu-sama, please absorb from me as much as you can..."

Shiori finally directed her passionate gaze straight at Masatsugu.

"My grandfather's power within me—Absorb the source of ectoplasmic fluid."

Their faces were in close proximity. Masatsugu could feel her exhalation from her whispers. If he ventured forward slightly, a deep kiss of passion would be easily in reach.

And Shiori was willing too—

Masatsugu could read an air of acceptance from her eyes. However, he did not put this notion into action.

Such behavior should wait until their relationship transitioned into a different form.

Hence, Masatsugu made close contact with Shiori's neck instead, opening his mouth to suck.

"Princess."

"Masatsugu-sama, your face is still so cold..."

"Doesn't matter. The warmth you give me is enough."

"Th-Then feel free to go harder—Mmmm."

The instant Masatsugu kissed her pale neck, forcefully sucking the warmth from her tender skin, Shiori moaned.

Shiori had inherited the blood of the sacred beast Lord Tenryuu. The warmth of her blood was precisely the essence giving rise to ectoplasmic fluid as well as the nourishment needed by Masatsugu, who was unable to resupply the normal way.

The stolen heat flowed into Masatsugu's body and soul, resulting in a feeling of union.

The sensation was making Shiori ecstatic, slowly putting her into a trance.

Oddly enough, today—The princess smiled.

"What is it, Princess?"

"Nothing... I have been quite happy lately."

"Happy?"

"In the past, I felt no affection for my bloodline, but now, the blood I inherited from my grandfather has become your nourishment and energy for battle, Masatsugu-sama... It fills me with an indescribable bliss, apparently bringing fulfillment to my heart."

Saying that, Shiori showed a smile of happiness again.

"Fufufufu, I must be acting a little odd."

Masatsugu smiled too. This princess was really too adorable.

His smile was very natural, not the twitch of the cheek he usually displayed. Interacting with Shiori's deep emotions must have warmed up his heart.

"Princess."

Masatsugu called to Shiori. Usually, she was the heroic lady,

intelligent and sharp, but it was during times like these when she was particularly prone to showing her innocent side. One would be hard pressed to find a woman more lovable.

Filled with affection for her, Masatsugu sucked on her neck again. He sucked forcefully, tracing his tongue over her.

"Masatsugu-sama! Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!"

"Princess."

"Masatsugu-sama!"

They called out to each other involuntarily, but this was fine. It was part of deepening their bond.

Shiori was clad in only a light yukata and Masatsugu could feel her body's elevated temperature. Simply lying on the bed, embracing each other, her warmth was spreading to his body.

Shiori's emotions were extremely aroused.

Under Masatsugu's weight, she hugged him tightly too.

Her pale legs were also wrapped firmly around Masatsugu's left leg. Her posture was as though she was embracing Masatsugu with all her heart and soul.

Shiori cried out just like that.

"Ah—Mmmm! Masatsugu-sama... Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Masatsugu's absorption of the stolen warmth was generating an intimate sense of connection.

This feeling reached a climax and Shiori fainted. Her entire body went limp and Masatsugu inadvertently did something impertinent.

He gently caressed the cheek of the princess who had bravely given her all.

"I-I can't believe the princess and Onii-sama are doing something like that—?"

Outside Princess Shiori's bedroom, Hatsune was shocked.

She had brewed some ginger tea with honey added, thinking of serving it to the princess. Recently, the princess' health had been poor, so she wanted her to sleep well.

The bedroom's door was slightly ajar.

The last person to enter must have failed to close it properly. Hatsune accidentally heard voices coming from the door's gap.

Just as Hatsune was panicking, the princess fainted inside.

However, she could not forget Princess Shiori's final moan before losing consciousness. The impression was too striking.



"W... W-W-What on earth is going on?"

The flustered Hatsune almost barged into the room.

Fortunately, she instantly came to her senses and suppressed her impulse. What kind of excuse would she use to appear in this kind of situation?

However, Hatsune could not ignore the princess' state of health.

After agonizing for a while, Hatsune heard a sound.

Ring. Something like a bell had sounded inside the princess' room.

"A message?"

She also heard her Onii-sama's whispers inside the room.

It was a pipe fox used by Imperial Japan's military for emergency communications. The marmot-like animal had used its teleportation abilities to serve as the princess' messenger.

Part 4

It was midnight and November 7th had just started.

Just earlier, Hatsune's surrogate older brother, Tachibana Masatsugu, had flown off from the dorm premises, riding a wyvern summoned by Princess Shiori using noetic control.

He had gone to intercept the thousand Escalibors coming from the Fuji tutelary fort.

Tonight, Richard I had finally made his move.

It was a yatagarasu that reported to the Suruga tutelary fort of Richard's advance, in other words, the retainer beast that Shiori had summoned at the Fuji River's shore and left there for reconnaissance.

Hatsune was also prepared for battle but this time, she was staying back on defense duty.

This was the largest enemy army to attack so far, after all. Hatsune was still a novice Chevalier and could very likely get in Masatsugu's way. Hatsune was filled with mixed feelings including relief and disappointment.

"Princess, the car will be at the dorm soon. Please wait a moment!"

"Mm-hmm..."

Helping her exhausted lady, Hatsune spoke gentle words.

They had just left the entrance of princess' private quarters, Black Lily Dorm. Shiori had changed out of the yukata she wore for bed and into a clean blouse and skirt. Her platinum blonde hair had also been tied in a ponytail with a ribbon by Hatsune.

They were about to head to the Suruga tutelary fort to be present at the command center for the interception operation.

However, Shiori was truly exhausted tonight. Unable to stand on her own, she had to lean on Hatsune for support.

Her face was pale and her breathing was heavy. The symptoms resembled anemia.

"Uh, Princess, do you have a fever... Or did you do something to overexhaust yourself?"

Hatsune was going to ask if she had a fever but changed her question midway.

She could not forget the intimate act between Shiori and Masatsugu that she had secretly witnessed before news of Richard's attack arrived. Back then, Hatsune had sensed something resembling mystic power between the two of them...

The princess gave an unexpected answer.

"I have mentioned before that Masatsugu-sama cannot replenish his ectoplasmic fluid the normal way. However, he is able to use a Feat of Arms to steal ectoplasmic fluid from either a Chevalier or a princess of a sacred beast's bloodline. I have been providing it to him every day..."

"Eh!?"

"Perhaps I am reaching the limit of my physical stamina..."

"P-Princess, there is nothing more important than your health. Why must you go so far!?"

Hatsune expressed her concern in surprise but the imperial princess shook her head with dignity.

"As a leader, I must commit everything in my ability to help my retainer to draw out the full extent of his power. Besides, Masatsugu-sama also—"

Shiori smiled gently for a moment.

"Fufu, he said he was willing to offer his life to me, so I must

respond to him with commensurate resolve. If the blood that flows through me is truly noble, then all the more reason for me to do so..."

"Princess..."

The princess expressed utmost resolve and actually committed ideals to action.

In this regard, Hatsune's surrogate brother—the Resurrectee whose true identity was unknown—Tachibana Masatsugu, was the same. He had protected the princess many times and kept Suruga safe. Using his wit, vigor, and life as weapons, he had compensated for the limited number of Legions at his disposal.

Determination took root in Hatsune's heart.

Riding a blue wyvern, Tachibana Masatsugu was flying alone through the sky over Suruga City.

He was accompanied by an army without humans.

This army consisted of the red-purple Kamuy Legions known as the "Kanesadas," numbering 360—

Masatsugu had converted all of the ectoplasmic fluid granted by Princess Shiori into winged giant soldiers. The Legions were surrounding Masatsugu in a packed spherical formation.

Flying at a speed of fifty to sixty kilometers per hour, this would be considered marching speed.

Maintaining this sort of low-speed flight required almost no consumption of ectoplasmic fluid on the Legions' part.

"...Riding a wyvern isn't bad at all."

A wyvern's body was roughly twice the size of a racehorse.

Masatsugu was riding the wyvern's massive body on a saddle with his feet planted in the stirrups and reins tightly in his hand.

Frequently "riding horses" in his past life, Masatsugu was very accustomed to this style. This was something he realized during the retreat from Fuji City.

Of course, retainer beasts were born to serve humans and quite intelligent.

They flew steadily and even amateur riders need not worry about falling off. Furthermore, it only took minimal directions for them to understand the rider's intent, unlike horses that required experienced equestrian skill.

In any case, Masatsugu's army flew along Suruga Bay's coast.

When he reached the mountain road that crossed Suruga City, he discovered the enemy in the sky over Satsuta Ridge.

The British army of red was approaching from the Fuji direction.

The other side was not flying fast either. The approaching army of elite troops was precisely the crimson Escalibors.

"Exactly a thousand... Outnumbering my army three to one. Looks like the enemy isn't holding back anything in the attack."

Chevaliers were able to instantly count each other's armies by sensing their noesis.

Looking at the thousand Escalibors, Masatsugu muttered to himself.

The red army was also in a spherical formation. Both sides were using the same formation. In a frontal clash between 1000 versus 360, the battle would be settled in a matter of minutes.

The side with superior numbers would have greater firepower from their rifles.

Moreover, closely packed Legions would generate protective barriers whose particles overlapped, increasing defensive power.

The two armies were some distance apart. At this rate, they would soon get into range for a shootout. Masatsugu issued a command

before that.

"Scatter."

Instantly, the 360 Kanesadas broke out of their packed formation.

Masatsugu's Legions had flown in a packed formation within arm's length of one another.

Now, the formation collapsed and all Kanesadas *scattered*.

They distanced themselves from each other all at once, separated by over dozens of meters.

The Kanesadas approached the thousand Escalibors while scattered. Hence, the British and the Japanese forces clashed in the sky over Mount Satsuta.

The thousand British knights were in a packed sphere—

Looking from afar, they seemed like a "giant crimson ball" floating in the air.

Richard's army of Escalibors stopped over Mount Satsuta, hovering motionlessly. This was like how a great yokozuna would confidently take on a weaker sumo wrestler.

Naturally, the Suruga side did not have the luxury of doing the same.

After scattering, Masatsugu's 360 Legions became "a loose collection of red-purple flying dots." They attacked the crimson sphere from all directions.

"Begin to fire. Harass them like annoying mosquitoes." Masatsugu ordered while staying back as the commander on his wyvern mount.

Both the British and the Japanese troops began to exchange rifle fire.

From every Legion's muzzle, scorching beams were fired

incessantly.

The Suruga side's shots were ineffective against the solid protective barrier of the thousand Escalibor's packed formation. Moving around haphazardly nearby, the Kanesadas attacked, firing rifle shots like insect stings.

Even ten thousand stings could not harm the sphere's iron defense.

Needless to say, the 360 "red-purple mosquitoes" swarming the "giant crimson ball" were shot down one after another.

Masatsugu smiled, unconcerned about the unfavorable situation.

After all, maintaining a packed formation to exchange fire would result in rapid annihilation at the enemy's hands.

"Let's start saying hello the Hijikata Toshizō—Shinsengumi—way."

Shooting down the scattered Kanesadas meant spreading gunfire over a wide area.

In other words, the *density of gunfire* would decrease.

Of course, Legions were capable of firing their rifles at a rate of ten shots per second, so charging against this curtain of death would inevitably lead to casualties.

However, using this Feat of Arms would slightly lengthen their survival duration.

"All men draw your swords. Time for you to enter the stage."

Riding his wyvern, Masatsugu was wearing an officer's black jacket over his student uniform.

The sheathed Japanese sword hanging on his belt was his personal blade, Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada. With his left hand on the sword's hilt, he invoked the Feat of Arms—Gankouken.

The red-purple Kanesada Legions' weapons all turned into Hijikata Toshizō's famous sword.

Guarding their center line, the Kanesadas raised their swords to use as defensive shields. This was the tactic they had used to counter the Garter Knights' longbow formation.

"Compared to the arrows of the Garter Knights... Mere rifle fire is nothing but child's play."

The Kanesadas started to use swordsmanship in response to Masatsugu's expectations.

The Escalibors' flashing rain of light was sweeping over all directions. The Kanesadas blocked the approaching beams with deft moves of the sword by slight twists of the wrist.

Among them, some Kanesadas dodged the shots directly.

With a slight turn of their upper torso, they dodged the deadly attacks.

This level of eyesight was truly a godly feat. Sensing bloodlust beforehand to evade gunfire—Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada had empowered the Legions to reenact an experienced Chevalier's skillful techniques.

The Kanesadas were no longer "red-purple mosquitoes."

Instead, they were a team of master swordsmen sent to suppress the British army's packed formation from all directions.

...Naturally, superb swordsmanship alone was not enough to overcome the unfavorable numerical odds of three to one. All the enemy had to do was focus fire, giving up the scattered offensive in all directions, and even Hijikata Toshizō's swordsmanship would find it difficult to resist.

However, swordsmanship was ultimately one of the few advantages on the Suruga side.

The current priority was to make full use of this advantage to buy time. To approach the enemy all at once, to provoke that man's zeal and lure him into going "all-out"—

Just as Masatsugu was preparing to put his plan into motion...

"What—?"

Tachibana Masatsugu, usually calm and composed, widened his eyes in surprise.

For better or worse, the Lionheart was prone to whims of fancy and this time was no exception.

"Oh? So that is the legendary tachi of the samurai... What dazzling luster and strength, a match for my Escalibor, the sword of King Arthur."

Richard was riding a white wyvern.

The white wyvern was located in the center of the spherical formation of the thousand Escalibors.

"Hohohoho. So the villain of Suruga turns out to be a man who entrusts his ideals to the sword too?"

It was rumored that one of the Chevaliers defending Suruga could be a Resurrectee.

Instead of turtling inside the tutelary fort, the enemy had actively gone out to fight a skirmish.

Presumably, he must have made the call that there was no advantage in fighting Richard in a siege battle. Or perhaps, he was simply a man who enjoyed fighting out on the field. In any case, he was unlike Richard's past opponents.

"Excellent, now this is a worthy opponent for a knight. My army, respond properly to the enemy's spirit!"

Richard had changed out of the combat attire of common soldiers.

Once again, he was wearing an officer's black uniform along with his crimson cape. Seated on the saddle of his wyvern, Richard drew the sword hanging at his waist.

"Stop shooting, my knights! Brandish the royal sword to fight!"

All Escalibors obeyed their master's command and stopped firing.

The roughly three hundred red-purple Legions were scattered around Richard's spherical formation, fighting with drawn swords.

"Scatter yourselves too. Break formation and fight in melee at your own discretion."

Medieval Europe was where Richard the king and knight had roamed the battlefield.

Back then, the aristocracy shunned projectiles, condemning them as "cruel weapons." The reason was because such weapons would cause unnecessary casualties. Using bows, even nameless commoners were able to kill fierce knights.

However, Richard did not hate projectile weapons.

Projectiles were able to end battles swiftly and the straightforward Lionheart liked this aspect. On the medieval battlefield, he too had actively deployed crossbows.

His collateral descendant Edward's Feat of Arms involving bows and arrows was perhaps a continuation of his legacy.

That being said, the Lionheart's true preference lay in the sword, the horse, and the lance swung on horseback.

"Cut down the samurai's swords and the men of Suruga, Escalibors!"

Escalibor was the magic sword appearing in King Arthur's legends and Richard had named his personal sword after it.

Escalibor was cognate to the English name "Excalibur." Richard the Lionheart was enamored with the knightly ideal in King Arthur's legends.



"So the other side has broken out of formation too?"

Masatsugu muttered with a frown.

Both armies were clashing in the sky over Mount Satsuta. Masatsugu had led 360 Legions while Richard's Escalibors numbered 1000 and had formed in a packed formation.

Normally speaking, the key to victory lay in "how to make the enemy's formation collapse."

But this time, Richard had discarded the packed formation on his own initiative. Unencumbered by a formation, the thousand British legions attacked the Kanesadas freely.

"Impulsive... Yet his instincts are rather sharp. What a troublesome move he made."

Seeing the two armies locked in a chaotic skirmish, Masatsugu clicked his tongue.

Melee combat could be seen everywhere in the sky over Mount Satsuta.

Instead of firing their rifles, the Escalibors were using the bayonets on the front end of the barrel to exchange blows with Japanese swords, determined to pierce their enemies with deadly blades.

The Kanesadas still held the advantage in melee combat.

Brandishing their renowned blades, they exhibited the swordsmanship of Hijikata Toshizō and the Shinsengumi again and again.

For example, they used the flat seigan stance to execute mid-level slashes, severing the British Legions' rifles; or blocking the enemy's slash then following through with a slice through their crimson abdomen; or entering a low stance, luring the British knights to attack, then slicing through the enemy's jaw and face from below—

All kinds of amazing sword moves demonstrated that samurai pride was intact.

In contrast, the Escalibors had no such skill with the sword. However, they were physically two sizes bigger than the Kanesadas and had overwhelming strength.

The British knights were coarse in their use of blades, but plenty fast and effective.

They used light thrusts in fencing style, trying to overwhelm their opponents with speed. The instant their weapons clashed, they switched to using their bodies to smash into the Kanesadas. No matter how difficult Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship was to handle, they did not give up on finding momentary openings to slash the bodies and armor of the Kanesadas—

...The Kanesadas were faster at slaughtering enemies.

However, the Escalibors were not much worse. Besides, they still had a numerical advantage of three to one.

As the melee battle persisted, the Lionheart's army was clearly going to win.

"If he held the formation and fought me slow and steadily, I could still engage using all kinds of little tricks..."

Masatsugu shrugged.

During a skirmish, what mattered was the strength of individual soldiers and *numbers*.

Richard I had unintentionally avoided troublesome calculations and instinctively chosen the battlefield's golden truth of "winning through simple brute force."

This was the cleanest tactic towards victory, giving the enemy no room for tricks and guile.

"Impressive as always, the Lionheart. Even if he is a rash fool... No, precisely because he is a big fool who is super rash, that's why he is especially difficult to handle."

Richard I was probably a "war genius."

Masatsugu was very impressed. The Lionheart had found the method to victory through instinct and personality, overcoming theory and established tactics in the process. If someone like that was not a genius, who would be a genius?

"Compared to him, I'm just a dog at most."

Leaving the chaotic battlefield, Masatsugu surveyed the entire battlefield.

He had his wyvern rise to a higher altitude for him to overlook the two armies locked in battle. The crimson British knights and the red-purple samurai were producing a clamor of clashing blades and scorching wind pressure.

The armor of Legions cracked open from time to time with a splatter of blue ectoplasmic fluid.

Masatsugu found his target.

In the middle of the chaotic battle, the Lionheart was roaming the battlefield with his wyvern—

The enemy general was located. Chevaliers were able to experience what their Legions saw and heard. A Kanesada that had witnessed Richard informed Masatsugu of the precise coordinates.

"...Dogs have their own way of fighting. Let's go."

Masatsugu patted his blue wyvern's neck, ordering it to charge.

He was going to charge into the carnage for a "one-on-one duel of valor."

Of course, the enemy was the fierce Richard I. Masatsugu's cheek twitched to smile proudly. The duel that was coming up next had nothing to do with chivalry or samurai spirit.

Masatsugu decided to make effective use of his most prided tactics from the ancient past.

If one were to describe Masatsugu as a dog, then he would definitely be a "hound."

The blue wyvern gradually accelerated, its altitude decreasing. It was charging towards a corner of the battlefield where King Richard was.

It was finally time to hunt the lion.

Chapter 6 - Battle between Lion and Hound

Part 1

Legions were normally described as "winged giant soldiers."

However, they did not have true wings. Instead, they simply had "wing-like decorations" on their backs. Some Legions even lacked such decorations.

Consequently, their ability to fly had nothing to do with wings.

They simply hovered in the air, producing thrust from their bodies. Furthermore, there was a secret hidden under their feet. Their soles were capable of producing buoyancy, allowing them to use the atmosphere as a foothold, stepping on air as though it were mother earth herself.

This was why Legions were able to use swordsmanship, unarmed combat, and other martial arts in the air.

After all, these were all skills that were designed and trained with the ground in mind.

(Well, carrying out a melee battle in the air does have the drawback of having "a huge consumption of ectoplasmic fluid.")

And currently—

The two armies were in the sky over Mount Satsuta, exhibiting their respective martial arts.

Charging into the chaotic battle, Tachibana Masatsugu finally arrived before that man. Masatsugu was riding a blue wyvern of Imperial Japan while the other party was on a white wyvern of Britain.

"Wow!"

The man widened his eyes in surprise on this first encounter.

King Richard I, the Lionheart. He was the general leading a

thousand Escalibors.

"I see—so *this* is your objective?"

"What do you mean?"

"Please, do not play dumb. You wish to have a duel with me, because winning would instantly overturn the disparity in numbers... You are an admirable samurai, good sir."

With burning eyes of fervor, Richard spoke with ecstasy in his voice.

"I am quite moved. Never did I expect in this Far East island nation to encounter a knight well-versed in the aesthetics of the duel."

"Not at all. I'm not worthy of your praise."

A somewhat crude term occurred to Masatsugu. The so-called "game brain."

Applied to Richard I, it would be the chivalry romanticism brain, perhaps? His thoughts were simplistic and he liked to interpret everything through the lens of dramatic chivalry, just as Masatsugu suspected.

'The vast majority of his behavior undoubtedly consisted of unruly whims—'

Shiori had told Masatsugu that a certain historian had made such a comment on the Lionheart.

Were someone like him not a "war genius," it would have been trivially easy for Masatsugu to win.

Meanwhile, unaware of Masatsugu's thoughts, the Lionheart said, "You must recognize my name, don't you? Samurai, introduce yourself."

"Tachibana Masatsugu."

"Acknowledged. Tachibana, huh? In that case, let us begin."

Richard raised the sword he had been using like a marshal's baton and pointed its tip at Masatsugu.

Masatsugu quietly nodded and likewise drew Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada. The two of them prepared to duel quickly and efficiently.

Indeed, a duel did not need words.

Disregarding the differences between a Japanese sword and a one-handed western sword, they were both using swords as weapons.

Both weapons were comparable in length, neither projectiles nor lances, meaning that they had to fight in close quarters...

The two of them gently kicked their wyvern's belly at the same time.

The two wyverns flapped their wings and slowly flew forward.

Their distance gradually shrank. Initially five meters... four meters, three, two, one... Finally, the blue and white wyverns were about to brush past each other.

Incidentally, both Masatsugu and Richard were wielding their swords right-handed.

Swinging their right arms at close range, their deadly blades were about to strike their opponent—In the next instant...

"Hah!"

"!"

Richard gave a mighty shout while Masatsugu remained silent.

An exchange of blows. Both riders were holding the reins in their left hand, thus leaving only their right hand available for battle. The renowned katana and the western sword collided with a mighty clang, producing a shower of sparks.

"Lionheart, you have a fine sword there."

"Hohohoho, the samurai's katana is not the only celebrated sword."

Masatsugu offered concise praise and Richard responded proudly.

When ordinary swords clashed with Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, their blades would end up severed as easily as bean curd. However, King Richard's sword had managed to block the Japanese blade.

He was probably using some kind of heirloom sword treasured by the English royal family.

The two of them exchanged another four or five blows at once.

A battle of offense and defense where both sides blocked with their sword while trying to slash the opponent using their prized blades.

The sound of blades clashing was as rhythmic as musical instruments.

Only first-rate swordsmen were capable of producing such a melody of the battlefield.

Furthermore, their wyverns were no slouches either. They glared at each other with savage demeanors, striking violently with their flapping wings. The wyverns were also pushing tightly against each other in a contest of strength like a sumo wrestling match.

...Suddenly, Richard's wyvern kicked with its right leg.

This kick fell near the waist area and Masatsugu's wyvern backed away.

The two wyverns became separated by four or five meters, interrupting the sword match. There was no way to slash each other no matter how far they stretched their arms.

"Another go?" Just as Masatsugu muttered to himself, a palm-size retainer beast appeared on his shoulder.

The messenger pipe fox had teleported here. Preparations were evidently in order. There was no more need to stall for time.

The next step was to see how much of a blaze he could light up in Richard's heart. Seeing the pipe fox scurry into his chest pocket, Masatsugu nodded to himself.

In contrast, due to the separation interrupting the fight, the Lionheart said with exasperation, "Hmph. If only I could fly on my own."

Richard grinned fearlessly while expressing his dissatisfaction.

This could not be helped. Unlike Legions, Resurrectees like Masatsugu and Richard did not have the ability to fly and could only fight by riding wyverns—Logically, that should be the case.

"What the hell!?"

However, Richard's next step surprised Masatsugu.

Noesis suddenly gathered around Richard's left arm, shimmering like a mirage, and turned into a *gigantic left arm*. It was clearly an Escalibor's arm.

Raising his left arm, which had turned into a Legion's gigantic arm just like that, the Lionheart made a fist and attacked—

A left straight. A crimson fist of steel was heading straight for Masatsugu!

"You are wide open, Tachibana!"

"...Kanesada!"

Masatsugu hastily called the name of his Legion.

He subconsciously raised his left hand, believing that his palm would be able to stop a winged giant soldier's left straight.

Next—A giant arm also flew out from Masatsugu's palm.

It was a red-purple Legion's, a Kanesada's left arm. This arm opened its palm and firmly caught the Escalibor's deadly punch.

"I see now."

Seeing the amazing feat his left arm had accomplished, Masatsugu understood.

The first time when he saved Princess Shiori at the Suruga tutelary fort, he had stopped a falling Kamuy using his body of flesh directly, even pushing the Kamuy's heavy body away. Just as he was doing now, he had summoned a Legion *into his body* and used its strength to achieve that superhuman feat.

"This is a move... that virtually all modern Chevaliers are incapable of," Richard grinned.

Upon closer examination, one could see "phantoms" of Legions behind the two knights and their wyvern mounts.

The hazy outlines of two winged giant soldiers were shimmering unsteadily like mirages. The red British knight Escalibor attacked with a thrust of its fist while the red-purple samurai Kanesada raised a palm to block—

These figures had manifested after Richard and Masatsugu had merged themselves with their own Legion.

"Tachibana, sure enough... you are the same as I?"

"Sorry, I can't answer you."

"Then I shall ask you again after I seize victory, assuming you survive!"

Then the "phantom giants" disappeared.

The reckless skill of summoning a Legion within oneself was a heavy burden on one's body. It was not supposed to be used for long periods unnecessarily.

The two wyverns came close together again to put on another show of sword against katana.

However... This was not Masatsugu's ultimate goal.

As expected, Richard was an excellent fighter.

At this rate, the smaller Kanesada army would be wiped out before the duel finished.

Hence, Masatsugu allowed Richard's sweeping blow to strike him *on purpose*.

Richard's sword sliced open Masatsugu's right flank with a splatter of blood. The wound was not shallow either.

"Guh—!"

"Kukukuku. So this is the extent of the renowned swordsmanship of the samurai!?"

"...Retreat. Move up as much as possible *to avoid getting caught*."

In contrast to Richard's gloating triumph, Masatsugu quietly issued orders.

The blue wyvern flapped its wings and backed away before rising rapidly, speeding up to flee the scene.

Masatsugu gently touched the chest pocket of his school uniform.

"Discard your notions of fleeing. Fight me to the bitter end!"

Richard yelled in delight.

He was utterly consumed by the desire to pursue Masatsugu. In the next second, it was the Lionheart's turn to be alarmed.

"What!?"

Gunfire from the ground was attacking the Escalibors and the Kanesadas that were locked in an aerial battle.

In fact, Masatsugu's army were not the only Legions that had sortied from the Suruga tutelary fort.

The three Chevaliers, Habuna, Maike, and Tabi, had also headed

out to the suburbs.

Each of their Chevalier Strength was around fifty and they had summoned 150 Kamuys... Moving their forces extremely stealthily.

They did not fly in the sky over Suruga like Tachibana Masatsugu had done to draw the enemy's attention.

The trio had secretly summoned Legions at the military zone facing Suruga Bay. Under the night sky, all hundred and fifty Legions marched underwater without emerging from the sea surface. The army lurked in the shallows by the coast near the spot where Masatsugu's Kanesadas had intercepted the British army.

Naturally, they had avoided flying in the air to prevent Richard from discovering them.

This tactic was decided right from the start. They were going to head out separately from the Kanesadas, moving either through the sea or at extremely low altitudes. Then while Masatsugu was stalling for time, they would get into formation as quickly as possible...

The battlefield where two Resurrectees clashed was the sky over Mount Satsuta.

The three Chevalier's 150 Kamuys were set up in the hills of Mount Satsuta.

The goal was to deliver the first devastating blow to King Richard's army of one thousand, while helping Tachibana Masatsugu to *escape* as well.

"Gather together, my knights! Enter formation again!"

While Richard yelled, a number of crimson Legions were shot down again.

While Masatsugu was playing the part of a duel between generals, a volley of rifle fire emerged from the ridgeline of Mount Satsuta below.

The three Chevaliers rescued from Fuji City had entered the battle with the 150 Kamuys under their command.

Their entire army was firing from the ground at the Escalibors and Kanesadas that were locked in an aerial battle, killing them one after another. Protective barriers were having virtually no effect.

"It was worth it for me to act as bait," Masatsugu muttered while enduring the sharp pain from his flank.

The Kanesadas and the Escalibors had broken out of their packed formations to engage in a chaotic skirmish. Protective barriers were ineffective unless Legions were clustered together with friendly forces.

Under such circumstances, the thousand Legions on the British side suffered heavier losses.

There were only 360 Kamuys while the Escalibors were roughly thrice as numerous. The chances of indiscriminate gunfire hitting an Escalibor was naturally higher.

"Not quite the same as planned... But it's a good result."

Until now, Masatsugu had been doing everything he could to draw Richard's attention, thus buying plenty of time.

Playing to Richard's preferences, Masatsugu had ordered his army to draw their swords and charge the enemy, and he even played the part for a duel between generals. Naturally, the romanticism of chivalry was not his goal.

Everything was done in order to set up an ambush on the ground and lure the fierce lion into a trap.

Originally, he wanted to charge into melee when the back or the side of Richard's army presented an opening. However, that would be too much of a luxury.

Confronted with unexpected anti-air fire, the Escalibors entered a packed formation again.

The sphere finally took form. The white particles of the protective barrier glowed brightly, blocking the flashing rain of light being fired from the ground.

Seeing the British army regrouped in their defensive formation, the Legions on Mount Satsuta stopped firing en masse.

Currently, the red British Legions were down to 812 in number.

"Roughly two hundred eliminated..."

This was achieved only through the Kanesadas drawing their swords to engage the Escalibors, followed by the barrage of anti-air fire just now.

Conversely, the Kanesadas led by Masatsugu were down to 203. Of the original 360, almost half had been killed in the fighting earlier. This was the limit to what could be achieved through direct confrontational tactics.

"All units retreat. Defend me with everything you've got."

Masatsugu issued his command quietly and glanced at his wound.

The slice was not deep enough to reach internal organs, but the blood loss persisted. There were also intermittent pangs of pain. He needed first aid as quickly as possible.

The problem was that he had no time to be treated, so all he could do was ignore the wound.

In front of the injured commander, the remaining 203 Kanesadas withdrew from the sky over Mount Satsuta. Riding his wyvern, Masatsugu followed them.

In any case, they needed to do everything they could to escape to the sea—In other words, towards Suruga Bay.

The second phase of the hunt was about to begin.

Part 2

"Receiving such a severe wound... Looks like Onii-sama must be in a lot of pain."

Hatsune whispered anxiously.

She was currently at the nation-protecting keep in the heart of the Suruga tutelary fort. The nation-protecting keep was a forty-meter tall building of red brick. A round disk at the top was not a clock but a gigantic fengshui wheel.

Hatsune had accompanied Princess Shiori to the keep's ground floor hall.

Reconnaissance was mainly conducted by retainer beasts such as yatarasus, Mibu wolves, and wyverns. The intelligence they gathered was collated here to serve as the basis for analysis and making judgment calls.

Inside the keep were many soldiers in charge of this as well as noetic officers.

What the retainer beasts observed on the battlefield was converted into video through noetic control and replayed at various locations in the hall. Now that she had become a Chevalier, Hatsune was entitled to ask the soldiers to report or explain information to her.

However, seeing everyone so busy, she felt uncomfortable adding to their workload as a newbie.

Fully mobilizing her eyes, ears, and brain, she sought to grasp the situation. In fact, she had already gained a holistic understanding.

...Tachibana Masatsugu was on the move with 203 Kanesadas, heading to the waters of Suruga Bay.

...The 150 Kamuys entrenched in Mount Satsuta were attacking the British army to support the Kanesadas' retreat.

...Leading 812 Escalibors, Richard the Lionheart had sent 200 to land on Mount Satsuta and attack the three Chevaliers' Kamuys, meanwhile leading the remaining 612 to continue the pursuit—

"Onii-sama's retreating army only has about two hundred while the pursuing Richard has six hundred. He's still outnumbered by three to one..."

Also, Masatsugu's target was Suruga.

He had *decided in advance* that regardless of the path taken, his final destination was the Suruga tutelary fort.

Akigase Rikka was also ready for battle to coordinate with his arrival.

Princess Shiori had summoned the genie Sakuya and carefully explained their battle plan.

"That is all. Is there anything you don't understand?"

"No... problem, Princess, Your Highness."

The princess was sitting in a chair. Her physical condition was still poor.

Dressed as a shrine maiden, a young girl was in front of Shiori. Featuring bangs cut uniformly at eyebrow height, eight or nine years old in appearance, she was the genie Sakuya's image.

The intangible image avoided making eye contact with Shiori.

"I am about to leave the nation-protecting keep. Send a pipe fox to ask me if you encounter any difficult decisions, and I will send you instant instructions."

"Understood... Please leave it, to me," Sakuya mustered a quiet voice to answer.

She looked quite adorable but compared to Britain's Morgan le Fay, she was far too unreliable. However, what truly surprised Hatsune was what the princess had said.

"Princess, you're leaving? Where to!?"

"I need to find Masatsugu-sama. He will be returning to Suruga soon. See me off, will you?"

"Yes ma'am."

Hatsune supported Shiori, who was unsteady on her feet, and they walked out of the nation-protecting keep.

Now that they were out of the genie's earshot, Hatsune voiced what she suspected.

"Onii-sama deliberately intercepted Richard away from the tutelary fort... Princess, it's because Sakuya isn't very reliable, right?"

Martial prowess alone was not enough to make a fine Chevalier.

Hatsune needed to learn tactics, strategic vision, and methods to handle troops as quickly as possible in order to become a full-fledged Chevalier. This was why she had shared her own deductions.

"That is one of the reasons, but according to my guess..." Shiori gave an unexpected answer. "It seems that Masatsugu-sama does not like to fight on either side of siege battles."

"Huh? But didn't he succeed in defending the Suruga tutelary fort last, and at Fuji City, he was also the one who suggested a raid on the enemy fort?"

The clever princess shook her head in disagreement with Hatsune's rebuttal.

"Being able to accomplish it and liking it are separate matters... Besides, in the case of sieges... He ought to have plenty of experience."

"Onii-sama mentioned this!?"

"No, it is simply imagination on my part."

"...Princess, don't tell me you've already guessed Onii-sama's identity?"

Shiori's confident tone did not sound like simple imagination.

Hatsune asked in doubt but Shiori simply smiled ambiguously and said, "I admit that a number of ideas have occurred to me, but I have neither concrete evidence nor a certain name. I will observe for while longer before I share my thoughts with you."

While they were chatting, a gigantic white wolf came over to them.

This was a Mibu wolf that Shiori had summoned using noetic control. The massive retainer beast, as large as a horse, lay down on the ground on its own initiative.

The princess was about to straddle the wolf but her footing was unsteady.

Shiori lurched, almost falling over backwards. Hatsune hastily caught her. Looking at the face of the lady she served, she noticed the princess' pallor and abnormally hot body temperature.

Shiori was suffering from a serious fever. As her personal lady-in-waiting and knight, Hatsune made a call.

"Princess, you need to stop overexerting yourself!"

"Nonsense, this is my own decision to make..."

"No, it's the doctor's decision. And in the absence of a doctor, I'm making the decision."

"N-No, I must hurry to assist Masatsugu-sama—"

"Don't worry! I know everything about what needs to be done to help Onii-sama!"

"Eh—?"

"Rest properly and leave it all to me, Princess!"

Stopping the surprised princess, Hatsune mounted the Mibu wolf's back instead.

She patted the wolf's white neck and it immediately stood up. Her orders were very simple.

"Find Onii-sama... Tachibana Masatsugu's scent and take me there. Princess, I'll be right back!"

"H-Hold on a moment. You know everything? No way!?"

Shiori collapsed and sat on the ground. Her physical strength had reached its limit.

Then mounted on a Mibu wolf, Hatsune rode gallantly to the battlefield.

When Legions flew at top speed to charge into enemy ranks—

They almost never fired their guns. When devoting all ectoplasmic fluid to an all-out charging attack, they used the impact to stab their bayonets into the enemies' bodies.

This was the kind of charge that Richard the Lionheart had revealed at Fuji City.

The impact of a full-powered charge was astounding, capable of inflicting critical damage upon the enemy army in one strike.

This tactic recreated the "cavalry charge" of ancient battlefields.

There are some who say that the cavalry charge was a masterpiece of the battlefield.

Masatsugu had no objections to that. Indeed, it was undoubtedly a very troublesome tactic.

Heavy knights or riders equipped with armor and chain mail, riding galloping warhorses to charge into enemy ranks, stabbing with the tips of their lances during the clash.

...When a horse was galloping, its speed, momentum, and weight were all added to the power of the charging attack.

The thrusting lance could easily pierce enemy soldiers. It was also impossible for the human body to withstand the trampling from a charging horse. Most terrifying of all, this type of charge was conducted by a great force of numbers, tens, hundreds, or thousands at once.

Struck by a cavalry charge, any army would suffer substantial casualties.

Throughout the ancient and medieval ages, heavy cavalry was equal in value to the "tank of recent modern invention"—

Although this was a common view, there was a caveat. The cavalry charge was also a tactic that was difficult to use correctly.

As living creatures, horses were unable to maintain a full gallop for long periods of time. They would tire quickly.

The first priority was to conserve the horses' strength and use it at the appropriate moment. Moreover, any obstacles preventing a straight path would also cause a charge to end in failure.

Besides, horses were exorbitantly expensive and costly to feed. Keeping horses was a laborious affair.

However, once all these difficulties were surmounted to successfully execute a cavalry charge—Its power was unparalleled.

When cavalry charged into the heart of enemy's ranks at a critical moment to defeat the enemy general and the main force, all that remained would be a disorderly mob.

Even against an enemy several times one's own numbers, it was easy to take care of the scattered rabble.

The ancient king of Macedon and pioneering genius of war, Alexander the Great, was also quite accomplished in such tactics...

"No wonder a guy like Richard loves to use it so much," remarked

Masatsugu satirically.

After injuring his right flank, Masatsugu first headed south, in other words, towards Suruga Bay. The battlefield of Mount Satsuta was next to the sea and Masatsugu soon arrived over the water surface.

He was currently riding a wyvern, flying over the ocean at night.

The remaining 203 Kanesadas were flying in his surroundings.

The pain was gradually subsiding from his abdominal wound and the bleeding had stopped. A Resurrectee's body was evidently resilient to a supernatural degree.

"We are the dead who have risen up from our graves... Now that I think about it, this is only to be expected."

Masatsugu surmised that perhaps he had a constitution that would not die so easily.

However, his consciousness was undoubtedly fading. Once he reached his limit, he was probably going to pass out directly.

And the "not dead person" in full health was right behind him, chasing Masatsugu's army.

"Hahahaha. I am surprised you can endure that kind of wound for so long!"

Under the Lionheart's command, 612 Escalibors pursued relentlessly.

They were charging at full speed from behind, trying to end the battle in one go.

"Charge, my Escalibors! Allow the samurai of the orient to witness our knightly ways!"

The British Legions had formed a V-shaped wedge formation, the same one that Richard had exhibited at Fuji City, a formation specialized for the cavalry charge.

Its main function was to penetrate the enemy army with its sharp tip and tear apart their formation.

"What a hot-blooded guy. As soon as I fled, he chased in delight," muttered Masatsugu quietly.

Masatsugu the chased and Richard the chaser were both going at over 500 kilometers per hour. The two armies were separated by a hundred or so meters.

As retainer beasts, wyverns were actually incapable of reaching such seeds.

A "Kanesada phantom" had appeared around Masatsugu and his wyvern mount.

Reusing the technique of summoning a Legion and merging it with his body, Masatsugu used a Kanesada's flying ability to transport himself and the wyvern.

"Kukukuku! This is my first time too, to use this method to charge alongside my Escalibors... You are truly a delightful opponent, Tachibana!"

Richard was using the same technique to fly at extreme speed.

The legendary English king had summoned a red legion's phantom to transport his flying mount.

However, the overall speed of both armies had dropped.

The airborne melee battle had consumed a large amount of ectoplasmic fluid. Following that with a full-speed escape and pursuit, both the Japanese and the British forces were exhausted. All Legions were beginning to decrease in output.

"Hohohoho, your prided fleet-footed escape is slowing down."

"The same goes for you. The Lionheart's pursuit is nothing impressive either."

Separated by substantial distance, neither side could hear each

other.

However, Masatsugu could guess what the Lionheart was thinking, more or less. He muttered to himself, delivering rebuttals to the imagined words of his enemy.

Masatsugu focused and prepared his next move for the enemy.

In a situation like this, Richard the Lionheart was definitely not a man who would hold back.

"My knights, thank you for enduring so far. I hereby bestow Coeur de Lion upon you all!"

"I knew it. He's using that move!"

The pursuing 612 Escalibors released a huge quantity of mystic power.

Sensing the release, Masatsugu noticed Richard activating the Feat of Arms—Coeur de Lion. Its effect was to ensure that his Legion would complete the charge even ignoring death—

So far, the Escalibors had consumed a lot of ectoplasmic fluid and their flying speed had clearly dropped.

But soon, their speed slowly increased... No, they had recovered their original speed. The Lionheart's Feat of Arms had enabled the British army to charge at peak condition.

In contrast, the Kanesadas' flying speed remained slow.

The balance was finally broken on the lead they had maintained so far in the chase.

Richard's army gradually closed in. Having escaped so far, the 203 Kanesadas were going to be caught within a few minutes, ending up in total extermination.

All prior preparations would be in vain if they were to be caught.

Masatsugu hastily commanded, "Fire backwards!"

"Tsk, petty tricks!"

Masatsugu's army was originally flying while facing forwards.

Maintaining the same flying directionality and speed, the 203 Kanesadas turned around to fire. They continued to fly straight towards their destination except their bodies were facing backwards.

Of course, their rifles were aimed at the back—towards Richard's approaching army.

All the Kanesadas pulled their triggers.

The entire army directed continuous fire opposite to their flying direction. It was like stunt shooting.

The 612 British Legions closing in took on the gunfire in their wedge formation. The Kanesadas were aiming at the tip of the wedge.

...The purpose of this wave of continuous fire was not to inflict damage.

After all, blessed by Coeur de Lion's effects, they were effectively immortal until the charge was over.

However, continuous fire from the two hundred or so Kanesadas were able to suppress the charging Escalibors.

The dense curtain of gunfire worked. The wedge stopped closing in momentarily.

However, the distance to the enemy was still shrinking slowly.

The Lionheart's powerful noesis had pushed the Escalibors' strength and speed to the very maximum.

Fifty meters until the rampaging lions would catch them.

Forty meters, thirty meters, then at twenty meters—Masatsugu knew his plan was a success.

The nation-protecting keep of the Suruga tutelary fort was not far away.

...Initially, Masatsugu had retreated from the sky over Mount Satsuta then flew over Suruga Bay.

Once Richard invoked Coeur de Lion, Masatsugu turned towards Nihondaira where the Suruga tutelary fort was situated. *He knew that the moment had arrived.*

Flying over the mountainous terrain of the military zone, Masatsugu returned to the tutelary fort at last.

"Scatter!"

"What!?"

At Masatsugu's order, the 203 Kanesadas scattered in different directions.

The Escalibors charging single-mindedly at full power did not stop. Neither were they able to stop. And right ahead in their path, a gigantic dragon was waiting for them.

It was the ifrit Seiryuu in charge of protecting the Suruga tutelary fort.

Part 3

A magic circle, seventy meters in diameter, manifested in the sky over the tutelary fort.

The magic circle was a product of oriental magic with complicated patterns and Sanskrit characters. The gigantic "dragon image," comparable to the magic circle in size, was precisely the ifrit Seiryuu.

Its serpentine body was covered with sapphire-blue scales with two deer-like antlers on its head and stubby limbs.

The gigantic dragon image had occupied the air majestically.

Ifrits were supposed to release powerful noetic energy to create a dome-shaped noesis barrier to cover the entire tutelary fort.

But right now, Seiryuu was not using its noetic energy for defense.

Seiryuu roared fiercely and attacked the British Legions.

The image of the blue dragon opened its gigantic jaws and lunged at the 612 Escalibors that were charging at full power in a wedge formation.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

As noetic divinities, ifrits were ultimately conglomerates of noetic energy. Their gigantic bodies were not corporeal.

Hence, Seiryuu's massive jaws unleashed noetic energy which was normally used to create noesis barriers.

The surge of noetic energy turned into gigantic magic circle, glowing with divine radiance.

The British Legions crashed into the circle, head on, of course.

Formidable noetic energy had been poured into the magic circle,

sufficient to serve as a tutelary fort's defensive wall, and was equivalent to a noesis barrier compressed into a round shape.

Colliding with something like this would cause massive injuries to the charging side.

The Escalibors in the tip of the wedge formation, reaching one third of the entire army, were struck by the violent armor-shattering impact, causing many of them to become dismembered or decapitated in the process.

Suffering such heavy injuries to their brain and internal organs, humans would have died on the spot.

Richard's army suffered at the hands of their excessively powerful charge. However, the heavily wounded Escalibors were undeterred.

"How interesting—"

Richard the Lionheart smiled proudly.

Together with the Escalibor phantom, he was at the very back of the wedge formation.

"According to legend, we Plantagenets are the cursed brood with the devil's blood flowing in our veins! A devil on earth... will never fear a mere dragon!"

The red wedge's tip, one third of the army, was already in a broken state.

However, the 612 Escalibors in the formation continued to charge, breaking through the magic circle of the noesis barrier.

Even the giant image of the blue dragon was almost trampled to dust.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh—!

Seiryuu's scream resounded across Suruga's night sky.

Richard's army finally arrived in the sky over the tutelary fort and

was about to invade the enemy base.

The remaining job was simple. He would continue to push forward and clear out the army of red-purple samurai, checkmate the soldiers defending the fort, and end the battle.

At that moment, the Lionheart frowned.

"Hmm?"

After charging at full might against the giant dragon, the 612 Escalibors rapidly lost flying speed. The effects of the Feat of Arms had ended.

Namely, the effects allowing the Legions to finish a charge even in the face of death—

Coeur de Lion's astounding and miraculous effects vanished.

Having charged at full strength and speed, the wedge formation slowed down more and more. Finally, it was no faster than a car driving along urban streets.

This was not the worst of it.

Charging the ifrit had caused severe damage to more than one third of the army.

Among them, the Escalibors with fatal injuries such as broken necks and ruptured internal organs began to crash one after another. Death had taken them long ago.

Richard shrugged and said, "Oh well, the four hundred remaining will suffice."

There were still 432 Escalibors surviving.

They would have no trouble defeating the scattered red-purple samurai that had fled or Surugu's defending forces.

"Regroup and assemble at my side."

Controlling his wyvern, Richard made his way to the center of the army that had slowed down dramatically.

The 432 Escalibors were beginning to form a sphere when they were violently attacked by focused gunfire from the side.

Imperial Japan's blue Legions, 150 Kamuys, had taken flight to enter the fray.

All troops in this corps fired in unison. Escalibors began crashing down again, the ones unlucky enough to be shot in their vitals.

"New enemies? Activate your barriers, my knights!"

Richard commanded confidently but was met by a surprising outcome.

The white particles of the 432 Escalibors' spherical formation were quite weak, roughly half as strong as usual. Too much of their ectoplasmic fluid had been consumed.

The surprised Richard instantly figured out the reason.

"Tachibana, this was your plan all along!"

The 203 red-purple Legions returned to the battlefield to support their allies.

The red-purple Legions were identical in appearance and size as the Kamuys except in color. Their special Japanese swords had also turned back into bayonet rifles. Compared to the Escalibor or the Crusade—the strong British Legions—their physique was a size smaller.

Judged according to the Lionheart's aesthetics, these troops were weak and scrawny.

Glaring sharply at the Japanese forces, Richard gnashed his teeth.

"He finally fell into the trap..."

Akigase Rikka muttered to herself, soaring the sky on her wyvern.

She was flying alone some distance from the tutelary fort. Slightly earlier, the ifrit Seiryuu had been broken, failing to block the invasion of the hundreds of Escalibors.

However, the red soldiers of this British army were crashing down one after another.

Seizing the moment when the enemy was low on ectoplasmic fluid, Rikka had ordered the 150 Kamuys she had summoned to open fire.

Furthermore, the 203 Kanesadas led by Tachibana Masatsugu had assembled on the opposite side of Rikka's army.

The two of them had the 430 or so Legions of Richard's army caught in a pincer attack. With Rikka's forces on the left and Masatsugu's forces on the right, they sprayed gunfire simultaneously.

The Suruga side had set up two crescent formations in the shape of "()."

Richard's army was perfectly sandwiched between them.

"Do not let up on the attack. Leave them no room to breathe!"

Under attack from both sides, the Lionheart's army formed a sphere and deployed a protective barrier.

The left side of the sphere desperately returned fire against Rikka's Kamuys while the right side handled Masatsugu's Kanesadas.

The British had numbers on their side, but were stuck in a desperate predicament.

On the Suruga side, Rikka and Masatsugu's forces totaled only 350 or so.

The Escalibors' protective barrier was powered by roughly 430 Legions, normally capable of neutralizing much of the Suruga side's volleys of sweeping gunfire, but ectoplasmic fluid depletion had

sharply reduced its effectiveness—

Half the shots penetrated the barrier's particles, striking Richard's army directly.

The Escalibors ended up dying and crashing one after another.

"Now, a chance for victory is in sight."

Surveying the battlefield, Rikka breathed a sigh of relief.

The theory behind Tachibana Masatsugu's trap to hunt the lion was actually quite simple.

'I will first intercept his army outside the tutelary fort and lure him to Suruga while depleting his ectoplasmic fluid. Finally, we attack him all together.'

To accomplish this, Tachibana Masatsugu had used all kinds of clever feints.

He first used samurai swordsmanship and initiated a duel to stimulate the target's combative spirit and passion, then deliberately got injured to pretend to be routed. His excitement reaching a climax, the king of knights would order his entire force to charge against Masatsugu's retreat.

Without these clever arrangements, the lion's keen nose might have smelled the presence of a trap.

Furthermore, during this process, the enemy was guaranteed to launch an overwhelming offensive. At last, while fighting on the run, Masatsugu managed to lure the enemy into attacking in full force, using a tactic that exhausted his troops the greatest.

The chase in the final stage was also part of Masatsugu's trap.

The Kanesadas and Kamuys were a size smaller than the Escalibors in physique.

Smaller builds naturally meant lighter weight. Flying at equal speed, the heavier side would exert themselves more, which meant

greater consumption of ectoplasmic fluid. Rikka nodded in comprehension.

"The Kamys are smaller in build and always lose to the Crusades in contests of strength."

Using this tactic which turned the physique disadvantage around, they succeeded in dealing a heavy blow to the fierce king of knights. Rikka felt exhilarated, but the battle still required close attention.

Only faring a little better than the British side, the Kanesadas were also depleted in ectoplasmic fluid.

Rikka began to think, assuming she were in Richard I's position—

Part 4

"Ugh... I think I might've overdone it."

Riding his wyvern, Masatsugu had quietly left the Kanesada army.

Currently, the red-purple Legions had joined forces with Akigase Rikka's Kamuys to hit the Lionheart's army with a pincer attack, putting them at an overwhelming advantage.

However, Masatsugu's blood loss was too severe.

His consciousness fading, he was often making mistakes in wyvern control.

By the time he realized, he was some distance from the battlefield. Just as he tightened the reins, intending to return to the battlefield, a messenger pipe fox appeared on his shoulder.

'Onii-sama, look down. Come over to me!'

"What?"

Using noetic waves, the pipe fox was transmitting Hatsune's message.

Mount Udo was below. The Suruga tutelary fort was located on the highlands formed from the two small mountains of Mount Kunou and Mount Udo. The highest peak was only three hundred meters in elevation or so.

Looking down from the air, Masatsugu immediately noticed something unusual.

It was late at night and equally dark in the low-elevation mountains. However, a faint light was moving left and right down there. Masatsugu tried to land.

As expected, it was Hatsune.

Dressed in *Haikara-san* style, the little sister was waving a flashlight from the ground.

Hatsune was on a military road with a giant white wolf by her side—a Mibu wolf on lying on the ground on standby. When the wyvern landed on the road, the Mibu wolf remained unperturbed. Disciplined and loyal, it had been well-trained.

Masatsugu said from the wyvern's saddle, "What now? I'm a bit busy at the moment... Rather, I will be extremely busy next."

"Richard will be targeting the Kanesadas, right?"

"Yeah, you figured it out too?"

"Of course. I'd do the same in his shoes. The Kanesadas have fought a long battle too... It's just that they're less exhausted compared to the Escalibors."

Hatsune puffed out her chest and analyzed confidently.

Even behind the kimono, the round and full bulge of her bosom was visible.

"In the worst case, all he needs to do is attack the Kanesadas in full force while ignoring Rikka-sama's energetic army. That will definitely be easier to win."

"That's correct. Good intuition."

Masatsugu's cheek twitched in a smile.

He found it difficult to imagine Hatsune becoming a master strategist. But one day, her instincts and bravery would enable her to distinguish herself on the battlefield with many glorious accomplishments.

Like King Richard the Lionheart, for example.

"If you know all that... Then you understand what you need to do?"

"Of course! Upon my Appellation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune—"

Masatsugu tested Hatsune and she immediately chanted the holy words of summoning.

The girl in the kimono released a pulse of noetic energy. Although its strength and skill could not match the likes of Edward the Black Prince, Masatsugu was dumbstruck.

The strength of Hatsune's noesis was clearly different from before.

"Assemble now, my Legions!"

Hatsune called out loudly.

The noesis she released to the air transformed into seventy-two Legions.

They resembled Kamuys but were not Kamuys. The top of their helmets were elongated like the *eboshi* while their armor was deep red with a white garment on top.

The red and white Kamuy variant had received the name of "Kurou Hougan" from Tachibana Hatsune.

A total of seventy-two Legions. Hatsune's power as a Chevalier had thoroughly awakened. Normally speaking, Japanese Chevaliers only had a Chevalier Strength of around 30 to 50.

With a Chevalier Strength of 72, the maiden successor of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune was quite a formidable force.

Furthermore, Hatsune was still young and had room for future growth.

"Go, my Kurous. Go help Onii-sama's army to fight!"

Hatsune hastily ordered the Legions that had appeared overhead.

The seventy-two Kurou Hougans flew with agility towards the sky where joint forces of the Kamuys and the Kanesadas were fighting the Escalibors.

"Let's command from here."

There was no need to be charging on the front lines. Masatsugu decided to remain on the ground and climbed down from the saddle.

He stumbled when he stood on the ground.

"Are you okay, Onii-sama!?"

"Sort of. Don't worry, I can hold out for a while longer."

In the end, Hatsune lent a shoulder for Masatsugu to lean on and took him to the side of the military road.

Masatsugu sat down and leaned against the guard rail, finally getting a chance to rest his injured body. The rocky flying on a wyvern was physically quite draining.

Fortunately, Hatsune had brought a first aid kit.

Swiftly removing Masatsugu's jacket and stiff-collar uniform, Hatsune bared Masatsugu's upper half.

She first applied disinfecting alcohol to the wound on his flank, put on gauze, then wrapped bandages around his entire abdomen. Her movements were deft and clean.

"Nice skills. Are you experienced in treating wounds?"

"Yeah, I often got hurt along with my companions back when we were learning all kinds of things."

After giving a reply befitting a clan of larger-than-life characters, Hatsune sighed lightly and said, "Before going off to battle, Onii-sama, you said taking a hit from Richard might be a good method. I never thought you'd do it for real..."

"Simple necessity. Had I not done so, he would've been suspicious of my retreat."

As soon as the master died, the Legions under his command would become disorganized rabble.

It was very logical for a wounded Chevalier to retreat so as to avoid dying in combat.

"Besides, this is a wound with relatively few repercussions apart from blood loss at most. Anyway, it should be fine. Just give me a bit of alcohol and sew it up later, and it's all good."

"Wow, you really sound like an ancient general from the Sengoku period. That's fantastic."

"Not like. I *am* an ancient general."

"That's true. O-Oh right, Onii-sama."

Masatsugu was currently leaning against the guard rail of the road.

Hatsune was sitting next to him. She suddenly looked down and stuttered in a rare moment of bashfulness.

"Actually... I promised the princess."

"You promised her what?"

"She was originally supposed to come over to help... g-give you ectoplasmic fluid. But her body is at its limit, so I came in her stead —"

"Oh?"

Usually energetic and cheerful, Hatsune was having difficulty broaching the subject.

This previously unseen side to Hatsune was utterly adorable. Masatsugu leaned forward towards her, but the abdominal wound stung, causing him to frown.

"A-Are you okay, Onii-sama...?"

"I'm fine. Say, Hatsune."

Masatsugu reached out and held his little sister's hand.

The kimono girl's shoulders shuddered. She looked so sweet and

innocent. Masatsugu learned something from her reaction.

"You came to share ectoplasmic fluid with me, knowing what I did to the princess, right?"

"Um, yes... I-I came across it by chance and couldn't help overhearing..."

Hatsune was blushing to her ears in embarrassment.

She was not used to talking about scandalous topics. Considering Hatsune's pure and innocent personality... Perhaps she had no past experience in this area at all.

"Right, and you're a Chevalier now." Masatsugu whispered in Hatsune's ear. Her body stiffened increasingly.

She was very tense in both body and mind. Masatsugu did not plan on doing anything until she relaxed. Holding the little sister's hand in his cold palm, he said calmly.

"I was negligent to overlook the possibility of asking you for help. But I don't like forcing a girl to do things either."

"I-I came here to help you, so it's not forcing," Hatsune declared firmly but continued timidly, "It's just that... Umm, it's scary to commit, I've never been in a similar situation, so it feels very weird right now..."

"It's only natural for a maiden to feel this way. Don't worry about it."

"I-It's reached this stage, but now I feel... embracing a man might be too soon for me. To some extent, I feel this is something that should be done after officially going out with an eye for marriage!"

"Marriage, huh?"

"B-But don't you worry, Onii-sama!" Hatsune clenched her fist and smiled bravely. "It's common for a man and a woman to embrace each other for people like dancers or ballerinas. It's okay, I've prepared myself. It's honestly okay—"

"Meaning that it's fine as long as I marry you, right?"

"Huh?"

Masatsugu said to the surprised little sister. "The way I see it, you're not only a suitable partner for marriage... but also a woman I admire a lot. If that's the kind of relationship you want to build, I'm willing to give it serious thought."

"W-What crazy things are you saying, Onii-sama!?"

"You're an accomplished martial artist with a brave heart. Your boundless energy, vibrant cheerfulness, and unpredictable behavior all make you very adorable to me."

"Didn't you say before that I'm not on your mind at all!?"

"Of course. But now, we're talking marriage here."

Hatsune was very flustered.

Masatsugu continued calmly, "However, if I think about you as prospects for marriage... I believe that the man who gets to spend his life with Tachibana Hatsune will be a happy man indeed."

"O-Onii-sama! Stop it with the sweet talking!"

Hatsune had relaxed her body without knowing it.

Perhaps the conversation had relieved her nervous feelings somewhat. Holding her hand the entire time, Masatsugu knew that her shoulder was no longer tense.

Looking at their hands clasped together, Hatsune lowered her head again.

She was still shy but no longer expressed resistance.

"So... What do we do next? T-Tell me, Onii-sama."

"It's hard for me to move, so could you come near me?"

"W-We're already quite close. Aren't I next to you...?"

"Come closer."

Masatsugu pulled Hatsune's hand gently and she understood his intent. Hatsune nodded and slowly approached him.

Hatsune stared into Masatsugu's eyes.

Another ten centimeters closer and Masatsugu would be able to kiss her.

They were right next to each other. This time, Masatsugu pulled her forcefully and Hatsune mustered her determination, hugging him timidly.

"Oh—"

"Hatsune, you're so warm."

Leaning against the guard rail, Masatsugu could only lift up his torso.

Hatsune was lying on top of him. Through the meisen kimono, Masatsugu could feel the little sister's voluptuousness and warmth.

"O-Onii-sama, you're so cold..."

Hatsune had undressed Masatsugu earlier to treat his wound, so she was aware of the changes in his body temperature.

Due to the heavy blood loss and having to supply the Kanesadas with ectoplasmic fluid, Masatsugu's body was even colder than usual.

"When sharing ectoplasmic fluid with you, the princess dresses very lightly... Is there some kind of special meaning in that?"

"Of course. Dressing lightly means it's easier for me to feel the temperature of the blood flowing under your skin and inside your body. What I need is the ectoplasmic fluid that has melded into your flesh and blood."

"I... see."

After a moment's thought, Hatsune got up.

She shyly removed her meisen kimono and hakama in front of Masatsugu, leaving only a hemp undershirt.

The white and flimsy fabric offered see-through glimpses at Hatsune's skin.

Next, she untied the string at her waist. The front of the undershirt opened up to reveal a full view of the seductive underwear beneath. Over her chest, she was wearing a special tank top-style brassiere for pairing with traditional Japanese clothing. her slim waist and pale thighs were also in display.

"Q-Quit staring, Onii-sama."

Saying that, Hatsune turned her head, too embarrassed to make eye contact.

Blushing to her ears, she approached and positioned herself on top of him again. Thanks to her undressing, Masatsugu was treated to a view of Hatsune's wonderful cleavage from up close.

"H-How is this?"

"Excellent. Sorry for the trouble."

"No, it's okay. Onii-sama, both you and the princess work hard and do everything personally. I can't lose to you."

Now that Hatsune had removed her clothing, it was easier for Masatsugu to feel her warmth.

Virtually half-naked, Hatsune was lying on top of Masatsugu, using her palms to warm his shoulders and upper arm, but his temperature still remained cold.



Hatsune gathered her courage and hugged him tightly, wrapping her arms around the back of his neck.

Their bodies were pressed even more tightly together. Hatsune's bountiful bust was also compressed against Masatsugu's chest.

The soft and heavy sensation was mixed with tender elasticity.

So far, Masatsugu had been enjoying this sort of intimate contact.

Now, the sensation became even clearer. Immersed in indescribable pleasure, Masatsugu absorbed the body heat she offered to him.

However, Hatsune said sadly, "S-Sorry, I'm not used to this. Am I doing it badly?"

"Not at all. What makes you think that?"

"Because your body is still so cold..."

"Don't worry, it usually takes some time."

"Really...? But if there's another way, you have to tell me, okay? After all, this is an ongoing issue and I have to work hard to learn how to help you."

"Ongoing issue?"

Hatsune had only become a Chevalier recently.

She had not replenished her ectoplasmic fluid many times so the mystic power stored in her body was quite low. Masatsugu did not want to strain her too much today—

"The princess' state of health isn't too good, right? If this is the reason for that, I have help out starting tomorrow."

"That's right. I didn't think of that."

"Ah."

"What's wrong?"

"Onii-sama, your body is warming up slightly."

"It's all thanks to you."

"Fufufufu. I'm so happy. This feeling is incredible."

Hatsune smiled tenderly, pressing her chest even more tightly against him.

This sensation provided a different kind of enjoyment from

obtaining warmth. Furthermore, it felt like Hatsune, with her personality not fully matured, was acting affectionate, which Masatsugu found delightful.

"Oh right, Onii-sama. About what we were talking about earlier..."

Hatsune changed the subject.

"Didn't you mention... about going out with an eye for marriage? Can you give me some time to think over it slowly? This is our promise, okay?"

"If you say yes, I don't mind heading over to get registered tomorrow."

"C-Cut the nonsense, okay? This is for a lifetime, so it bears serious consideration! Besides, Onii-sama, you forgot the most important thing!"

"What?"

"According to family registry records, Tachibana Masatsugu hasn't reached eighteen yet. You can't get married!"

"Oh right, that's how it is with Japanese law."

Conversing with Hatsune while hugging together—

Masatsugu could feel his body gradually become burning hot.

Masatsugu was able to obtain substantial ectoplasmic fluid from the reserves provided by Hatsune's body and soul as a new Chevalier.

The Kanesadas born from Tachibana Masatsugu's noesis were heavily fatigued after the long fighting.

But now, they had gained extra strength. Masatsugu nodded contentedly, grateful for the little sister's labors.

Meanwhile, King Richard the Lionheart was on the battlefield—

"Hmm."

The battle was growing more and more intense, but he was forcing himself to relax.

Richard released the reins in his hand and cracked his neck. Then suppressing his natural fervor, he examined the current situation.

...Attacked on both sides after charging the Suruga tutelary fort, the Escalibors were down to less than two hundred and fifty.

...Somewhat annoyingly, seventy Kamuy variants with elongated heads had joined the battle.

...Both sides had given up on formations and switched to chaotic melee combat.

...Most infuriating of all were the red-purple Legions.

Tachibana Masatsugu's katana-using Legions were exhausted, faring not much better than the Escalibors. However, by some unknown trick of magic—

Just earlier, the red-purple Legions had regained their vigor.

From the corner of his eye, Richard saw another "red-purple" chop down an Escalibor with a decisive diagonal slash.

—If the red-purples were exhausted, at least there would be some chance of winning...

At this rate, going on a violent rampage with reckless abandon would only result in a futile death.

"Is it time? Hmph."

Richard was furious as soon as he imagined having to go back and face the Black Prince, lecturing him with a look of exasperation.

However, he would only have a chance to savor this displeasure if he returned alive.

"Escalibors, listen to me. You will fight to the bitter end here at this land of Suruga and sacrifice yourselves for my sake. Just leave seven of you to return with me."

Richard ordered the remaining troops to buy time while he escaped.

Having made his decision, Richard led seven Escalibors and ordered his wyvern to land in the mountainous terrain below. He was going to slip into the mountains under the cover of night to make his way to Suruga Bay. Then either flying on the sea surface or moving underwater, he would return to the Fuji tutelary fort.

"So be it. Fickle fortune decided to side against me today, that is all," said Richard quietly, gritting his teeth.

King Richard the Lionheart was a passionate and intense man. However, there were times on the battlefield when it was imperative to be calm. When time called for self-control, he was always able to control himself.

The more he held himself in check, the greater the flames that erupted in the future—

He convinced himself to maintain a calm mind for now.

"Tachibana, I will concede victory to you for today."

Saying that, Richard I left the battlefield.

Epilogue

Part 1

November 7th, it was late, just after midnight.

Richard I had attacked Suruga but the defensive forces at the Suruga tutelary fort managed to pull through.

After the long night, dawn finally appeared on the horizon.

"Seriously... What a turbulent night."

Akigase Rikka was currently at the Suruga tutelary fort's nation-protecting keep.

The keep was forty meters tall and Rikka was on the roof. The tutelary fort was located on the highest plateau in the area, Nihondaira.

This was the best vantage point of Suruga City.

Alone, she was enjoying the beautiful scenery of Mount Fuji and Suruga Bay under the morning sun.

Such extravagance was one of the few privileges afforded to the Suruga castellan after staying up all night. Rikka stretched.

"Come to think of it... I think I've seen Masatsugu-dono's methods somewhere before."

Following Tachibana Masatsugu's directions, Rikka had fortunately won last night's battle.

He had used all sorts of tricks to lure the peerlessly ferocious king of knights, leading him to fall into an encirclement trap—

Rikka had the impression that she had read about similar tactics in a textbook on strategy or military history.

"Whatever," Rikka shrugged and did not dwell on the matter for too long.

This only meant that "Masatsugu-dono" had used reasonable and effective methods.

The crux of last night's battle was how to draw out Richard I's passion and charging attack. The praiseworthy fact was that Tachibana Masatsugu had accomplished this skillfully. The theory behind the operation was actually quite simple.

"Putting aside whether he is Lord Hijikata or not, there is no doubt that he is amazingly talented."

Ultimately, the tactics in books were not too meaningful.

The crucial point was to be able to apply these tactics "on the battlefield under extreme conditions."

If knowledge alone could win battles, there would be no need for generals. Just find a random student, get him to read a manual on strategy and tactics, then install him as the commander. Enough said.

"I need to greet Masatsugu-dono... and the princess."

The first name to slip out tugged at Rikka's heartstrings unbelievably.

She felt a strange urge to hum. At that moment, a soldier ran over. Rikka suppressed the urge to hum and said with a nonchalant expression, "What's the matter?"

After hearing the soldier's reply, Rikka murmured in puzzlement.

"This early in the morning... A man wants to see me?"

"Good grief."

Half an hour later, Rikka was wearing an exasperated look in the castellan's office.

"How was I supposed to know who the hell is Alexis Yang? Just say you're Yang Zhongda, descendant of the "Generals of the Yang

Family," and I would've known immediately."

"I don't really like to call myself that..."

The citizen of Eastern Rome his late thirties replied a little frivolously.

Rikka was sitting behind the heavy office desk. The standing man was greeting her. Although he was dressed casually in a dark-blue jacket with beige pants, he was a soldier in active duty.

Alexis Yang's Chinese name was Yang Zhongda.

He was an acquaintance from the time when Akigase Rikka had been sent to serve Imperial Japan's ally, Eastern Rome.

"Even though the Yang family is famous for our generals, the women are particularly strong-willed and hold higher positions in the army. I don't really want people to know I'm a man from the Yang family, it's too embarrassing. Uh, I'm serious here."

"By the way, your wife... no, your ex-wife is also a distant relative of the Yang Family, isn't she?"

"We were in the same cohort during military academy. Now she's my superior."

After the battle against Richard's army—

A strange man had arrived at the gate of the Suruga tutelary fort and demanded to see the castellan. This frivolous commoner had claimed affiliation with the "Eastern Roman Empire's East Asian Administrative Region Military" and that he would explain his purpose after seeing the castellan...

"I'm surprised you managed to get to Suruga. Did you come from Tokyo?"

"Yeah, it wasn't easy crossing Hakone Checkpoint. Took quite a bit of work on my part."

Rikka nodded, figuring out the story.

Yang Zhongda had joined the military staff since long ago, but his abilities as a staff officer were quite mediocre. However, he was talented at noetic control and cultivating connections with civilian big shots or suspicious individuals.

This time, he must have used a combination of his own abilities and aid from others to arrive here.

"Major Yang, what is your purpose here in Suruga?"

"His Excellency asked me to come here and be your military adviser. Just think of me as a liaison. I'll be in charge of putting you guys in touch with the Roman military."

Rikka had heard whom Alexis Yang was currently serving as staff officer.

She shrugged. The so-called "His Excellency" could be no one else.

"Why did Lord Caesar send you directly to me, bypassing my father, the Tōkaidō Governor General?"

"Maybe... He thinks that Nagoya won't hold much longer, so he's making preparations in advance, as a precautionary measure?"

"If only Lord Caesar, who calls himself Imperial Japan's protector, had taken action earlier..."

Rikka spoke in sarcastic rather than grumbling tone.

"Then there wouldn't be any need for precautionary measures if he had helped Tōkaidō get rid of the British forces, right?"

"Well, there are various difficulties. All things considered, Imperial Japan is an ally, not a Roman province, right? We can't go too out of line."

"True. By the way, if the rebellion persists for the long term..."

Yang swept the issue under the rug by putting on a fool's look and Rikka stared at him.

"Eastern Japan with its strong ties to Rome will become your vassal state, while western Japan will be annexed by the British Empire... thus leading to an east-west split."

"Located right in the center, Tōkaidō will turn into Japan's version of Alsace-Lorraine, right?"

"This place you speak of, I recall it is a border territory that switched hands multiple times between Germany and France, isn't it? In other words, Rome and Britain will invade Tōkaidō repeatedly."

"This is purely the worst-case scenario based on speculation. Personally, I have no comment." Yang smiled wryly then put on a serious face to say, "His Excellency communicated a few plans to me for helping the isolated Suruga City and avoiding the worst-case scenario."

Part 2

"There are still so many problems..."

Lying on the bed in the sickroom, Shiori murmured.

Dressed in a blue patient's gown, she sat up. This was a special private ward in the Suruga tutelary fort's medical division.

"However, Masatsugu-sama and Hatsune are safe and sound, so let us celebrate this victory for now."

Last night, Shiori's physical strength had given out and she fainted.

As a result, she was admitted to the sickroom to rest.

At five something on the morning of November 7th, the two knights who had fought through the night yesterday, Tachibana Masatsugu and Tachibana Hatsune came to visit Shiori at her bed.

"Of course, I must also pray for those who were killed in action..."

Although the battle had ended in victory, there were a few unfortunate news.

In the earlier battle, 150 Kamuys had hid on Mount Satsuta to support the 360 Kanesadas.

The support forces were led by the three Chevaliers, Habuna, Maike, and Tabi. The Lionheart had left 200 Escalibors at Mount Satsuta to prevent them from striking his army from behind.

Even without their commander present, the British Legions still had numerical superiority. The three Chevaliers fought valiantly.

In the end, the two sides of this localized battle wiped each other out. Unfortunately, Chevalier Tabi had died in action.

In any case, Shiori expressed her concern for the Chevalier in her direct service.

"Masatsugu-sama, how is your wound?"

"Don't worry, at worst I just have trouble exerting force from certain parts."

Tachibana Masatsugu's answer was very straightforward.

After the duel against Richard I last night and intentionally receiving an injury, the Resurrectee had eventually returned to the tutelary fort and received treatment at the medical division.

"Princess, Onii-sama is so funny."

The other Chevalier, Hatsune laughed next to the older brother.

"He told the medic, 'for this kind of minor injury, just give me a bit of alcohol and sew it back up.' The medic gave him a good earful for that."

"After applying local anesthesia, he sewed up my abdomen very carefully."

"Seeing Onii-sama show no reaction to pain on his face, the doctor was totally astounded."

"I-I see..."

The lively maiden Chevalier was cheerfully talking about her "brother."

Masatsugu himself was listening on the side. This was clearly a scene of harmony after a victory. However, a certain worry took root in Shiori's heart.

Before rushing to the battlefield, Hatsune had said, "Don't worry! I know everything about what needs to be done to help Onii-sama!"

During that intense battle, Tachibana Masatsugu must have needed to refill ectoplasmic fluid.

Logically speaking, his source would have been... Shiori wanted to clear up the issue, but felt too embarrassed to ask.

If by any chance the answer was yes, she—

"Hey Onii-sama, let's stop by the commissariat later and take some of the canned liver they've been hiding? You lost a lot of blood and need some iron supplements."

"Sounds good."

"I'll cook them specially for you, okay?"

"Since it's canned, there's no need for seasoning, right?"

"Canned food tastes even better if you put in extra effort to cook it. Using my prided cooking skills, I'll reward you for fighting bravely, Onii-sama."

"You're very confident in your cooking?"

"Yes, I'm an expert in shortcut cuisine by using canned food."

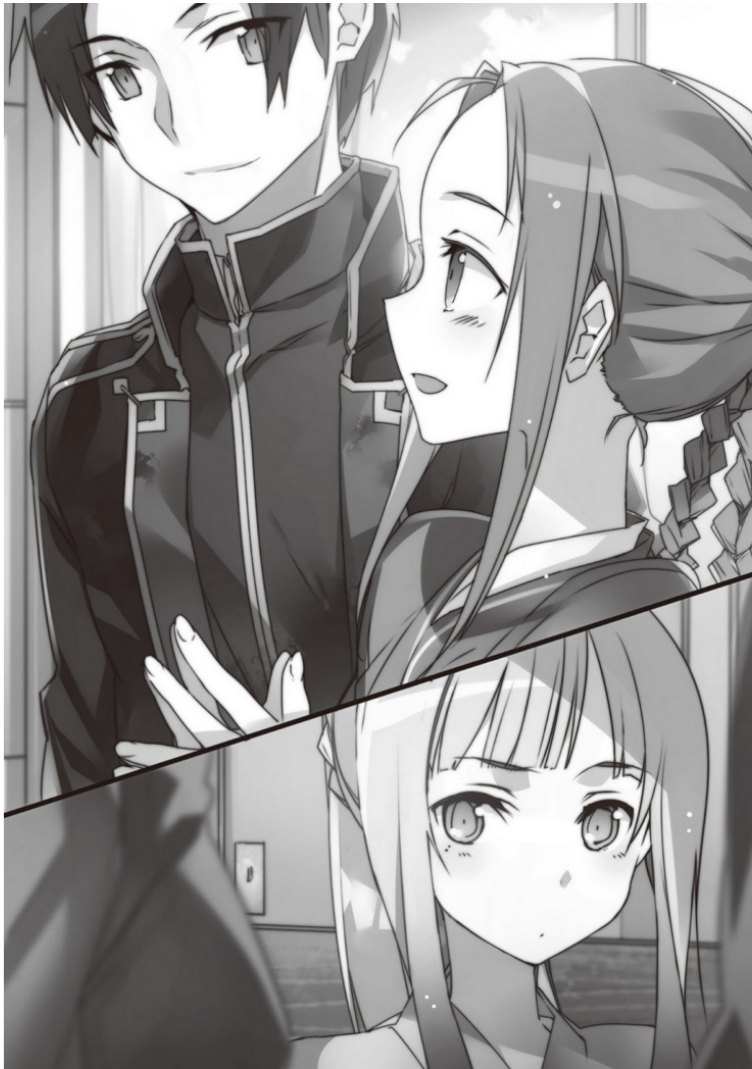
"...What about cuisine without shortcuts?"

"I am aware that my other cuisine still has room for improvement— Oh, d-don't tell me... Considering the future, Onii-sama, you're worried about my cooking skills?"

"No, I'm not too particular on how food tastes."

"I-I see. But I still need to work hard in that area..."

The two Chevaliers in the princess' direct service were chatting casually as usual.



However, Shiori was secretly surprised. Hatsune was acting quite differently from usual. Especially when she said the word "future," she seemed inexplicably shy, exuding an innocent maidenly allure.

As suspected, that matter needed to be cleared up beyond a doubt. Just as Shiori made her decision...

She heard a weird noise that sounded like metal shattering.

More precisely, it was not a noise but noetic waves. Masatsugu and Hatsune also looked around questioningly.

"What was that...?"

"P-Princess, do you know what happened?"

"Some sort of powerful noetic technique was applied to this area or even all of Suruga... No, it is the opposite. A noetic technique that was originally in effect has been lifted—?"

Shiori then said to the two knights, "Let us go find Rikka-sama. This could be something major."

Ever since the middle of October when the Crusades attacked the first time...

Suruga City and the surrounding region had been under the Restoration Alliance's noetic disruption. Once activated, this barrier-type noetic technique prevented the use of all airwaves and wireless communications within the affected area.

As a result, television and phones had been out of order in the city for over half a month.

The strange noise heard by Shiori and her Chevaliers, as well as other noetic officers, was the noetic waves resulting from the disengagement of this wide-area noetic technique.

"It seems like it was not due to a third party forcibly neutralizing it."

Three hours after the strange noise, Rikka was speaking in a conference room within the tutelary fort.

The result had come out after an emergency investigation. Apart from Shiori, Tachibana Masatsugu, Tachibana Hatsune, and the Chevaliers Habuna and Maike, there was also a young man in casual clothing who claimed to be a soldier from Eastern Rome.

"The British forces, who were responsible for it in the first place, apparently stopped it on their own accord."

"They must have decided there was no need to disrupt this area... Or perhaps, there is a more important mission that required them to shift their focus. I wonder which is more likely?"

Speaking in a relaxed tone of voice, the Roman soldier said, "Uh, I do have some related bad news to inform everyone. Now that noetic disruption is lifted, I can receive wireless communications from 'outside.' Those Restoration Alliance guys are proceeding with the attack on Nagoya even without Richard I's participation. According to the original plan, they will start today at noon..."

Part 3

"Regardless, even without Uncle's assistance, we will attack Nagoya as planned."

Edward was strolling along the shore of Lake Ashi, one of Hakone's famous sights.

He was accompanied by the doll possessed by the spirit Morrigan.

It was early morning and in the mountains at an elevation over 700m. The air was incredibly clean and pure while the lake water was blue and beautiful.

"While Uncle was on a rampage, I sent several Knights of Her Majesty that were on standby to contain Nagoya. They have the sea fully under control now. It is time to have to return to their original mission. Every knight wishes to go on a rampage. Naturally..."

Edward was dressed in a hot spring inn's yukata. He had just enjoyed a bath and was about to head back.

Enjoying Hakone's picturesque scenery, the Black Prince had his hands in his sleeves. Walking on wooden clogs that clattered crisply, he said solemnly, "I do have many complaints. I wonder what made Uncle crazy, but I originally looked forward to his ability to penetrate defenses. Forget it, I will leave the matter for now."

"Prince. About Suruga's katana user."

Dressed in a beret and sailor outfit, Morrigan murmured, "According to reports from spies who infiltrated Suruga... They found the name 'Hijikata Toshizō'."

"I will confirm it later. To think that Suruga harbors a samurai who piques the interest of British knights like us, as well as a beautiful princess of Imperial Japan. How fascinating."

Edward's handsome face smiled cheerfully. This aristocrat of the

Plantagenet dynasty said, "Looks like the day for me to fight directly is not far away."

"In my opinion... There is no need for a commander-in-chief to do that."

A tense situation was building up between Hakone Checkpoint and Suruga.

Currently, only two people were sharp enough to notice this. The Black Prince of the British Empire and the mysterious samurai of Suruga.

Certain of this, Edward nodded to himself in deep thought.

Afterword

Hello everyone, it's been a while.

The "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms* set on a fictional 20th-century stage plus armies of giants" has reached its second volume.

Thanks goes to all readers for their support as well as to everyone involved in editing, printing, and sales. I'd like to take this chance to offer my most sincere gratitude.

...Okay, let's get back to business.

For this series, I keep a list of future characters that are set to debut and some of them are based on figures from world history.

Debuting this time, we have a certain Mr. Richard, the English representative high up on the list.

He was supposedly the most popular of all English kings... though there's no way to tell for sure. Simply looking at things with this in mind, his personality and anecdotes are particularly vivid.

Furthermore, there's actually a background filled with historical romanticism behind the story of him "adoring King Arthur to the point of naming his own sword Excalibur"... Richard's family, the Plantagenets, were the patrons who backed the poets who promoted King Arthur's legend. I'd like to write more about this in the future. This piece of knowledge is unexpectedly important and really alters one's interpretation of the Arthurian legends.

Oh right, I included a glossary with this volume too.

This is dedicated to readers "who follow *The F●ve Star ●tories*, devouring all material down to every last timeline." Readers who can't be bothered can simply skip the glossary, it's fine.

I put in a few off-topic explanations such as Tennen Rishin Style or Crossbows, so please check it out if you're interested. I also touched

upon the aforementioned topic about Excalibur.

Now then, there seems to be a rising tendency for the "male ratio" of debuting characters.

It's been troubling me recently. Should I continue with this and go against industry trends or should I work hard on increasing readability by upping the female ratio?

In truth, Volume 2 has inherited the spirit of "fanservice isn't only limited to female characters!" and the guys do strip once in a while.

I'm still thinking, maybe I should just write a scene of "Prince Edward and the protagonist in an open-air bath together" in Volume 3 and have our artist, BUNBUN-sama, make an illustration out of it.

Dear readers, if it's not too much to ask, please confirm whether this happens in Volume 3 or not.

See you next time.

Glossary

General

Restoration Alliance (維新同盟): An alliance that Imperial Japan's Kinai Fiefdom entered with the British Imperial Forces for the purpose of "reforming Japan," rising up in rebellion against the central government in Tokyo.

Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada (和泉守兼定): The Japanese sword owned by the Bakumatsu hero, Hijikata Toshizō. Activation of its Feat of Arms—Gankouken confers katanas and Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship upon the user's Legions, as well as reenacting "infantry tactics" taught to the Shinsengumi troops by Hijikata Toshizō.

Ifrit (念導神格 / イフリート): Wielding powerful noetic energy, these noetic divinities stand as the highest ranked beings among spirits. Stationed at tutelary bases or military ships, they serve as "guardian deities" to bring about all kinds of supernatural abilities.

War Cry (戦場の歌 / ウォークライ): Roars or howls emitted by Legions from beneath their masks. Has the effects of causing noetic disruption and intimidating retainer beasts or spirits.

Onikiri Yasutsuna (鬼切安綱): A Genji trenchant blade's Appellation, inherited by Akigase Rikka, manifests as a Japanese sword.

Spherical Formation (球状陣形): Used by Legions in flight, a spherical formation allows for vigilance and defense in all directions. Conversely, has the drawback of not being able to focus fire.

Kanesada (兼定): Tachibana Masatsugu's Legion, essentially an upgraded version of the Kamuy. Red-purple in color, they are named after Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, Hijikata Toshizō's personal sword.

Kamuy (神威): Imperial Japan's mainstay Legion model. Fierce and agile, the Kamuy exhibits greater loyalty than other Legions,

showing utmost devotion to the Chevalier to whom it owes allegiance. Nicknamed the "Blue Samurai."

Charter of Chivalry (騎士道協定): These rules of international warfare strictly prohibit wanton violence, atrocities and plunder subjecting civilians to intentional harm, etc...

Pipe Fox (管狐): A small retainer beast used by the Japanese military, responsible for reconnaissance and relaying commands. Has the ability to teleport but only across short distances.

Crusade (クルセイド): The British Empire's mainstay Legion model. Massive in physique and exhibiting strong power and speed, its physical specs are outstanding among Legions. They are a size bigger than the Kamuy in physique.

Twelve Fiefdoms (十二将家): The local governments empowered by the Empress to rule each of the twelve provinces of Hokkaido, Ōshū, Hokuriku, Kantō, Tōsandō, Tōkaidō, Kinai, Ōsaka, Chūgoku, Shikoku, Kyūshū, and Okinawa.

Genie (念導精霊 / ジーニー): A female self-sustaining noetic spirit, specializing in noetic control and capable of causing various mystic phenomena. They are actually avatars of noetic divinities, the ifrits, and responsible for listening to human requests and controlling their "main body."

Retainer Beast (随獣): A familiar sent to the human realm by the godlike sacred beasts. Retainer beasts possess mystic powers and serve mankind. They are mostly used in military and police agencies.

Water Shrine (水霊殿): A reservoir of artificial ectoplasmic fluid. An essential facility located underground of every tutelary base.

Sacred Beast (聖獣): Godlike beings that protect countries and bestow miracles upon them. They are precisely the ones who resurrected ancient heroes and brought about mysterious powers and beings such as the Legions.

Meteorological Decree (天象勅令): a mystic weapon allowing

weather phenomena to be controlled and used effectively against Legions. Only top-class spirits and retainer beasts are capable of using them. Divided into lightning, wind, rain, snow and other types.

Lord Tenryuu (天龍公): The dragon deity protecting Imperial Japan.

Noesis Barrier (念障壁): A shield of noetic energy projected by an ifrit to deploy around a tutelary base or a military ship. The collapse of a noesis barrier will cause severe damage to the ifrit.

Noetic Disruption (念導攪乱): An overall term for large-scale noetic control techniques for canceling out electromagnetic waves and wireless communications.

Feat of Arms (武勲): A power used by Resurrectees and inheritors of Appellations. This special power enacts miraculous phenomena by recreating illustrious feats of battle from the past.

Protective Barrier (防御結界): A glow enveloping a Legion's body, has the effect of weakening incoming gunfire. In close quarters, the protective barriers from both parties will cancel out, rendering them ineffective, in which case the Legions would most likely switch to melee weapons.

Mibu Wolf (壬生狼): A mid-sized retainer beast used by Imperial Japan's military, a massive wolf almost the size of a horse. Silver fur. Used for a variety of missions such as combat, security and lookout.

Appellation (銘): A name or title symbolizing a Feat of Arms. People who inherited an Appellation have the power to summon Legions and can become Chevaliers.

Wyvern (翼竜): A mid-sized retainer beast used by the military in every country. Apart from transporting people as flying mounts, they also take on various missions such as reconnaissance, surveillance and anti-personnel combat.

Ectoplasmic Fluid (霊液): A blue liquid for enacting various

miracles, it is also the power source of Legions, coursing through their bodies like blood. When mass-produced with the aid of sacred beasts, it is known as "artificial ectoplasmic fluid."

Legatus Legionis (レガトウス・レギオニス): A title of honor used for warriors revived from the ancient past—the Resurrectees. The term *legatus legionis* is Latin for "legion commander." As a means for emphasizing status, it is used relatively infrequently.

Chapter 1

Edward the Black Prince (1330~1376): Attained his title of the English Crown Prince at the age of thirteen, a widely renowned general and knight. He later inherited the Duchy of Aquitaine in France and established his own court. Outlived by his father, he missed the chance to be crowned King of England.

Order of the Garter (ガーター騎士団): A chivalric order founded by King Edward III of England, the Black Prince's father. It was said that he selected candidates carefully in an effort to revive the Knights of the Round Table. Both the king and Edward the Black Prince were members.

Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, Genbu (青龍・朱雀・白虎・玄武): Ifrits used by Imperial Japan, essentially boiling down to the four types of Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko and Genbu, known collectively as the Four Gods.

Ectoplasmic Blood Steal (霊血奪取): Tachibana Masatsugu's Feat of Arms, allowing him to plunder ectoplasmic fluid from people whose bodies and souls contain ectoplasmic fluid—such as princesses inheriting the blood of sacred beasts or Chevaliers—turning it into his own energy. Practical activation requires intimate skin contact.

Chapter 2

Photobook (写真集): can be substituted by magazine, manga, game, poster, video, picture, etc.

Princesses, Women Who Inherited the Blood Line of Sacred Beasts: Sacred beasts are guardian deities of their respective country. Priestesses married to them sometimes give birth to female babies. Princesses inheriting sacred blood are able to pray to the sacred beasts for miracles in exchange for their own lifespan. Once in a while, princesses with exceptional mystic powers are born.

Matsubayashi Samanosuke (松林左馬助): A master swordsman in the early Edo period. Claiming to have learned the art of war from a *tengu*, he founded the Musougan Style.

Legends of his abilities including "slicing a willow branch into thirteen pieces before it fell to the ground" and "decapitating a fly in midflight." After Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu praised him for being as agile as a bat, he started styling himself as *Henyasai* (蝙蝠也斎).

Musashibō Benkei (武蔵坊弁慶): Most of Benkei's legends originate from the *Gikeiki*, a collection of fiction about Minamoto no Yoshitsune. It seems that there really was a Musashibō Benkei among Yoshitsune's companions, but what he was actually like is unknown.

Richard I (1157~1199): Richard the Lionheart was King of England during the twelfth century. He was the son of Henry II, the founder of the Plantagenet dynasty, and Duchess Eleanor of Aquitaine. Succeeding to the English throne in 1189, he was also the greatest landowner in France, holding territories including the Duchy of Aquitaine, the County of Poitiers, the County of Anjou, and others. His courage and martial valor earned him the nickname of the Lionheart. In addition, he was a poet well-versed in Latin, a gourmet, and a master musician. Truly a talented man of both the pen and the sword.

Chapter 3

The *Hidden Truth* behind the Charter of Chivalry: Also known as yakuza kindness, which is basically... Submit obediently to us and we will guarantee your safety. Don't get any funny ideas if you know what's good for you.

Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune (九郎判官源義経): The Appellation treasured by the Tachibana clan. Needless to say, it is named after none other but Minamoto no Yoshitsune, the hero of the Genpei period.

Lionheart (獅心王): King Richard I would often style himself as the Lionheart. Back in medieval aristocratic society, monikers were bestowed by others. Many people considered monikers an honor and would use them as their own names. This was definitely not analogous to the phenomenon known as chuunibyou in modern Japan... However, in Richard's case, it can be difficult to say for sure.

Feat of Arms—Kotouhisshutsu (武勳《虎韜必出》): Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Feat of Arms, allowing instantaneous transportation of an army across short distances. The user is greatly drained afterwards. The maximum distance limit has yet to be ascertained.

Yatagarasu (八咫鳥): A small retainer beast used by Imperial Japan. Looks like a crow and is often used for recon and surveillance.

Chapter 4

Oda Nobunaga (織田信長): Nobunaga has been called a revolutionary progressivist but he actually held a great deal of respect for the imperial family and Shogun Ashikaga Yoshiaki and frequently made compromises. Neither the progressive policies of promoting commerce and industry nor the creation of a specialized warrior class separate from agriculture were exclusive to him. Other daimyos adopted such policies too. As for war, he was talented in orthodox methods, i.e. surpassing his enemies in wealth, troop numbers, and military equipment and sending out a big enough force to guarantee victory. "Victories that seem like great gambles" like Okehazama were actually rare exceptions. The reason why people remember Nobunaga as a "genius progressivist" despite his taste for steady and reliable methods is mainly due to the numerous fictional stories that caricaturized his character.

Honi soit qui mal y pense: French for "Shame be to him who thinks ill of it," a maxim regarded as the embodiment of chivalry. It originated from Edward III, who said the words while helping a certain noblewoman.

Locations Chosen for Water Shrines: Despite high spiritual quality, places deep in mountains are not suited for water shrine construction due to difficulties in channeling the energies of the local spirits of the land into the shrine. Also, large-scale construction and logistics is difficult in mountainous areas far from human settlements, making costs prohibitive.

Vanguard (先鋒): It is very difficult to make an accurate prediction before a battle as to how much combat potential a tutelary fort holds. After all, the mere reassignment of Chevaliers would affect the Legion total. Hence, the vanguard of the attacking side is tasked with "drawing out enemy numbers." People like Richard I, with sufficient military strength and good fortune to handle unexpected situations, are especially suited to vanguard duty.

Relationship between Strongholds and Chevalier Strength: For a Chevalier who has entered a tutelary pact, his/her stronghold

consists of everywhere within a ten-kilometer radius of the corresponding water shrine. Outside this zone, a Chevalier can only summon 10% of their Chevalier Strength. The fluid reactor of a military ship can substitute for a water shrine, allowing 50% deployment.

Chapter 5

Crossbow (弩): A bow that uses spring mechanisms. Using metal parts to secure a drawn bowstring, it allows specialized short thick bolts to be fired by pulling a trigger. Reloading took longer than normal bows, but crossbows were powerful enough to penetrate metal armor. In this story, Richard I remarked how his bow-using descendant was "very similar to himself" but that is actually incorrect. It was only after his death, starting with the Black Prince's great-grandfather, that the use of longbowmen became an English tradition.

Excalibur (エクスカリバー): King Arthur's sword was first known as Caliburnus. This was recorded in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, a pseudohistorical account of British history. During the mid-twelfth century, the sword's name was translated into French as Calibour in *Roman de Brut*. Arthurian legends circulating nowadays originate from the French poet Chrétien de Troyes, who rewrote Calibour as Escalibor (some people think it was just a misspelling), which gave rise to Excalibur when translated to English. In other words, the sword's name of Excalibur came about in France. Chrétien de Troyes' patron was Richard's elder half-sister, Marie of France, who had a deeply affectionate relationship with her brother, the King of England.

Incognito (おしのび): It was said that when Richard I was retreating in a foreign land, he disguised himself as a pilgrim to flee. Also, in the stories of Robin Hood, he often showed up to help Robin's gang in the guise of a mysterious knight.

Cruel Weapons (無慈悲な武器): During the medieval world of Christianity, bows and crossbows were called "cruel weapons" and banned by the Pope.... In truth, this was secretly related to the economic reason of "those killed by projectiles cannot be ransomed for money."

Chapter 6

High-Speed Flight (高速飛行): There have been records of Legions breaking the sound barrier while devoting all ectoplasmic fluid to high-speed flight. However, this was under circumstances of exclusively focusing on flying like a race car driver in a circuit. Fighting is impossible during high-speed flight.

Ectoplasmic Fluid Depletion (霊液の枯渇): Unlike machinery, Legions do not stop moving immediately when they run out of ectoplasmic fluid. There was once a Chevalier who fought bravely without resupplying ectoplasmic fluid for over a month. A shortage of ectoplasmic fluid would affect performance but activity can still continue. However, exhausted Legions are unlikely to win against those in a replenished state, hence Chevaliers will diligently refill ectoplasmic fluid, the same way that athletes manage their physical condition.